RUTH FIELDING AND HER GREAT SCENARIO

ALICE B. EMERSON

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Nanda Hanley
April 24-1927

IN ALARM SHE RAN TO THE DESK—THE SCENARIO WAS GONE !
"Ruth Fielding and Her Great Scenario"

Ruth Fielding and Her Great Scenario

OR

STRIVING FOR THE MOTION PICTURE PRIZE

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "RUTH FIELDING OF THE RED MILL," "RUTH FIELDING DOWN EAST," "RUTH FIELDING IN ALASKA," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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Books for Girls

BY ALICE B. EMERSON

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RUTH FIELDING AND HER GREAT SCENARIO

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RUTH FIELDING AND HER GREAT SCENARIO

CHAPTER I

THE ACCIDENT

"I THOUGHT you were on a vacation, Ruth!"

The girl who sat cuddled in the secluded nook on the cliff glanced up quickly as she heard her name spoken. A pencil dropped into her lap, and instinctively she put out her hand to cover a notebook.

"Helen Cameron! You sly imp to make me jump like that!" Ruth Fielding wheeled about to face her chum. "Lucky for me I wasn't sitting near the edge of the cliff, or I might have tumbled into the bay!"

"Your splash couldn't be any greater than the one you've already made in the moving picture world," came the retort.

"Now, Helen, none of your flattery!"

"Then tell me what you mean by working on a nice summer day like this? You're supposed to be resting, Ruthie. Instead, I find you scribbling

like mad in your notebook. That isn't my idea of a vacation!"

"I can't fold my hands and look at scenery all day long," Ruth declared, but with her usual warm smile. "What have you in the package?"

"That's what I want to know. It's for you, so I resisted opening it. The return address says Aunt Alvirah of the Red Mill sent it."

"Dear Aunt Alvirah!" Ruth's eyes were bright, and unconsciously she spoke in a softer tone of voice. "What do you imagine she's sent this time?"

"Suppose you open the box and find out!"

Ruth was already busy with the cord, and a moment later both girls viewed the contents of the package.

"Homemade cookies!" Ruth cried in delight. "Aunt Alvirah never forgets me, no matter how many miles I am from the old Red Mill."

"And you never forget Aunt Alvirah, no matter how great your success."

"I hope I'm not a prig."

"Don't worry, Ruthie dear; you aren't! I'd more quickly say you're a perpetual motion machine—a combination of a picture star, a director, and a scenario writer!"

"All of that? Oh, Helen, if only I could accomplish half the work you give me credit for!"

"Speaking of work, reminds me of something.

I happen to know that Mrs. Vanderwalker—she's the real leader of this summer colony, you know—is going to ask you to help her with a fashionable charity ball."

"The affair is to be gorgeous, I've heard," Ruth remarked, "and the cause is a worthy one. Just the same, I'm not certain that I'll have much spare time now that I've decided to——"

The girl stopped in the middle of the sentence, but Helen, who was helping herself to the cookies, failed to notice. Ruth looked thoughtfully out across the blue expanse of water, and continued:

"I guess I'm selfish to stay here at Cedar Grove Bay, for I know how lonesome Aunt Alvirah is without me. Uncle Jabez Potter isn't the most cheerful of companions."

"Right you are there," Helen returned, thinking of the miserly owner of the Red Mill. "But you're dead wrong when you say you were selfish to come here. After the strain of pushing through 'The Girl of Gold' for Mr. Hammond, you need a complete rest."

"Those days in Alaska were grilling, but I loved the excitement. Now that the worry is over, I'm happy that I finished the picture without too much expense to the Alectrion Film Corporation. I can turn my attention now to producing big pictures for my own company."

"The Fielding Film Company," Helen sang

out, for she liked to tease her friend. "Up and at 'em, Ruth! I tell you, your start is good."

"So was Napoleon's," Ruth retorted, for she did not allow herself to take praise too seriously.

"Don't get peeved," Helen grinned. "You can't escape the cold fact that 'The Girl of Gold' took the country by storm from the very date of its release. You've earned your success, Ruth, and don't forget it."

"Success often rests on a mighty slender thread. Up there in Alaska, for instance—when the heart of my picture was stolen."

"But you got the films back again!"

"With the help of my good friends. Don't think I've forgotten the part you and Tom and Chess had in the adventures."

Helen seated herself at Ruth's side on the rock and began to amuse herself by skipping tiny stones down the steep slope. After a brief pause, she reverted to a former subject.

"I hope you won't forget your promise, now that we're back from the jaunt."

"Promise?" In the moment of silence, Ruth's active mind had jumped to a remote subject.

"Don't you remember? You promised to relax."

"Well, I will." Ruth stretched herself with deliberate and graceful ease.

Helen looked closely at Ruth's notebook, wondering what it was that her friend was up to.

"I don't believe you're really happy unless you're working at something, Ruth Fielding. You must have an iron body as well as an iron will." She indicated the notebook. "What is it this time? Another scenario?"

"I was just jotting down a few ideas," Ruth remarked, trying to evade the question.

"More ideas!" Helen groaned in mock agony. "Ruthie, I know very well what that means. First thing we know, you'll be head over heels in work, or else scampering off to a far corner of the world on some exciting mission."

"No, I intend to stick right here most of the summer. This idea is different."

"Don't be so mysterious. You make me fairly wild!"

Ruth hesitated, seemingly on the verge of telling her secret. Then she shook her head and laughed.

"I can't tell you quite yet, Helen. You see, I'm not absolutely certain what I intend to do. But I've been thinking—" she broke off and finished earnestly. "If my idea works out the way I'm hoping it will, the greatest achievement of my career is before me!"

The girl's eyes lighted with enthusiasm and

she glanced out over the bay, for the time being oblivious of the presence of her chum.

"Perhaps you're thinking of directing another picture?"

"Well, perhaps." Ruth knew that Helen was trying to draw her out, and her tone told nothing.

"It must be a scenario," Helen guessed. "When you get that faraway look in your eyes, I know a masterpiece is starting to bubble in your mind."

"I hope you're right this time."

Helen decided not to coax Ruth to tell her secret, and accordingly changed the subject.

"What do you plan to do after our vacation is over? Take another shot at being a star?"

Helen had reference to the time when Ruth had successfully played the leading rôle in a picture, taking the part of a star who deserted the company at the instigation of one of Ruth's enemies. Ruth Fielding had made a name for herself in three distinct fields, and it was evident that she could not always divide her time and energy.

"I think not," Ruth replied. "It was fun being a star, but I feel there is a greater work—more opportunity—in the actual writing of the stories that are filmed. Pretty faces can always be found—ideas are more difficult to discover."

Ruth Fielding was one of the young women engaged in business who could not easily be classified

according to a type. She was far too pretty and charming to look like a hard-driven business woman, and certainly she did not fall under the rubber stamp of "beautiful but dumb."

"By the way, what happened to Tom and Chess?" Helen asked presently, after the two had discussed various angles of Ruth's work.

"I believe they went out on the bay in a rowboat." Ruth stood up and allowed her eyes to scan the bay.

"Can't imagine that twin brother of mine hurting himself by rowing about in the hot sun. Tom isn't that industrious."

"Well, they aren't rowing. They have a kicker motor."

"Trust Tom to think of that!"

"Let me tell you, that when it comes to acting as business manager of the Fielding Film Company, Tom isn't lazy!" Ruth shot back, coming quickly to the defense of the young man who had always been a little more than a friend, and who was eagerly waiting for the time when she would willingly merge her career with a home.

"There's a reason, as the advertisement says. Tom would walk a tight rope over Niagara Falls if you wanted him to."

"I notice your influence over Chess Copley isn't weakening," Ruth teased. "Look over there!

See that small boat? I think Tom and Chess are in it."

"You're right!" Helen cried eagerly, as she looked where Ruth pointed. "I can always tell that red sweater Chess insists upon wearing. He seems to be tinkering with the motor."

"Those kickers aren't always reliable," Ruth answered quietly, her eyes on the slowly moving boat. "One never knows when they may stop. Tom and Chess won't enjoy being stalled on the bay."

"Look, Ruth!" Helen scrambled from the rock and stood beside her friend. "I believe they've seen us, and are waving." Helen searched for her own handkerchief.

Ruth had not taken her eyes from the boat.

"They aren't waving to us!" she exclaimed, with a sharp intake of her breath.

Even as Ruth spoke, the girls saw a sudden flash of fire, seemingly from the rear of the boat. Almost before the horror-stricken girls saw the flying splinters and heard the report, they knew what had happened. The gasoline tank had exploded!

In that awful moment, as they saw two bodies hurled overboard, Ruth gripped Helen's hand.

"Tom and Chess!" Helen cried, clinging to Ruth. "They're gone!"

CHAPTER II

A DARING RESCUE

"QUICK, Helen! We must save them!"

For one brief instant after she saw the bodies of Tom Cameron and Chess Copley flung into the bay by the force of the explosion, Ruth Fielding stood paralyzed. Only an instant did she remain motionless. Before Helen entirely recovered from the shock, she was again calm and cool, ready to meet the situation.

Out on the bay, tiny tongues of fire were slowly creeping up over the stern of the doomed boat, threatening to envelope the entire craft. Chess was floundering in deep water, trying to keep his head above the surface. Tom's clothing, ablaze when the young man was thrown overboard, still smoked. He submerged himself, in an attempt to put out the fire entirely. The sight drove Ruth to action.

She grabbed Helen's hand and fairly dragged her the first few steps down the steep and rocky path that led to the bay. With Ruth in the lead, the girls ran and slipped over the rocks in a

frenzy of haste. At every step they endangered their own lives, but Helen and Ruth did not consider risk when those they loved were in peril. After Ruth made the one exclamation, neither girl spoke, for they knew that every bit of energy must be saved for the supreme effort that was to come.

There were no boats very near. The two girls reached the beach, and Ruth feared they were helpless. Frantically, they looked up and down the sand, and shouted for help. The few persons on the beach seemed equally helpless.

"I see a boat!" Ruth cried, her eyes sweeping the shore.

She ran down the beach, with Helen close at her heels. Two dories were fastened to the pier near the boathouse. With nimble fingers Ruth unfastened one craft, and made ready to push off.

"Get in," she directed.

Helen obeyed. Splashing in water nearly to her knees, Ruth put her weight to the boat and pushed. Then she scrambled into a seat and reached for the oars.

Unobserved by the girls, but in answer to their shouts, a rescuer now appeared upon the scene. A somewhat shabbily dressed young man who was loitering on the beach comprehended what was happening and ran quickly toward the second boat. Ruth caught sight of him as she pointed

her own dory in the direction of the burning craft.

"Good!" she observed grimly, applying herself to the oars. "We'll need all the help we can get."

Ruth Fielding was clear-headed and courageous. This was not the first time she had been called upon to face a trying situation. Indeed, from the time when she was first introduced to the reader in the initial volume of this series, "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill," she had plunged from one adventure to another.

"Out of charity," Ruth's great uncle, Jabez Potter, had, years before, taken the girl into his home at the Red Mill, located on the Lumano River, near Cheslow, in one of the New England states. Aunt Alvirah Boggs, who had left the poorhouse to become the housekeeper of Jabez, played the part of a real aunt to the orphan, whom she loved tenderly. In late years, Ruth's financial success had gained the grudging admiration of Uncle Jabez.

At the Red Mill, Ruth met Helen Cameron and the latter's twin brother, Tom. Helen and Ruth had merry times together at Briarwood Hall, and later they both studied at Ardmore College. The girls spent delightful vacations together, in the saddle, in the great Northwest,

on the St. Lawrence, in Dixie, in the far North, and other places.

Even before Ruth went to the war front, she learned that Tom was a man to be trusted. The engagement ring on her finger, which so nearly resembled the one Chessleigh Copley had induced Helen to accept, told Ruth's friends that the girl did not always intend to remain a single business woman.

But Ruth wanted a career as well as love, and Mr. Hammond, the president of the Alectrion Film Corporation, had given Ruth her first chance at scenario writing. Later, he aided her in organizing her own company.

The story of her latest success, "The Girl of Gold," is recounted in the book, "Ruth Fielding in Alaska." Upon their return from the North, Ruth and Helen, followed by Tom and Chess, came to Cedar Grove Bay, a quiet but fashionable summer colony on the Maine coast.

"Can you see Tom and Chess?" Ruth demanded anxiously, as the two girls were hastening to the rescue. "Look around, Helen!"

"I think I see them! Yes, there's Chess. He's clinging to the boat. No, he's stricking out for shore!"

"And Tom?"

There was a brief silence as both girls strained their eyes for a glimpse of Tom. In the heart

of each girl there was a fear that neither would voice.

"I see him!" Ruth cried in relief, a moment later. "He's on the other side of the boat!"

She bent to the oars with new energy. Along the shore, people were gathering in excited groups, having been attracted by the blaze and the shouts of the girls. Men were running up and down the beach, and several boats were launched.

Ruth did not look toward those on shore, for her eyes were fixed upon her oars or turned at frequent intervals over her shoulder toward the spot where she had last seen Tom's head. Time was precious. Tom and Chess burdened with heavy, water-soaked clothing, could not keep above the surface for many minutes without becoming exhausted. Besides, they might be badly burned.

Tom, who at first clung desperately to the edge of the burning boat, was forced to give up the hold long before Ruth and Helen reached him. He tried to swim, but the weight of his clothing dragged him down. He attempted to remove his shoes, and only managed to get one of them off. Tom then began to conserve his strength by treading water.

Chess was in grave danger, also, though his clothing had not caught fire as Tom's had. Of

the two, Tom was the better swimmer and the more skillful at handling himself in the water. The sweater that Chess wore acted as a sponge, and when the young man tried to slip it over his head, it clung the tighter to him. In his effort to rid himself of the garment he ceased to tread water, and he went down. He came to the surface, choking and sputtering.

Ruth and Helen were closer to Tom than they were to Chess. With a skillful turn of the oars, Ruth brought the boat about. She held it steady while Helen, having drawn in her oars, reached out her hand to Tom. He clutched it, and with his sister's aid gained a more secure hold on the edge of the dory.

Ruth pulled in her oars and went down on her knees, leaning over the side to help the young man. Slowly, an inch at a time, Tom was raised. More than once the boat tilted dangerously as too much weight was thrown on one side. Helen and Ruth kept the balance as best they could, and at last Tom was safely hauled in.

"Good work, Ruth! Tom, are you hurt?" Helen cried, before the other two could speak.

"A few burns and scratches—nothing much."

"We must get Chess," Ruth commanded.

One glance told her that Tom was not seriously injured, and immediately she turned her attention to the task that remained.

"That other fellow—the one that followed us out—is getting Chess," Helen announced.

Tom slid into a seat and caught hold of the oars. He disregarded the pain from a burned shoulder.

The stranger had rowed his boat close to Chess, but he had not counted on the weakened condition of the young man. Chess struggled bravely, but he had swallowed considerable water and his fatigued muscles refused to obey the commands of his mind. The stranger stretched out his hand to Chess, who reached for it, missed, and went down. He came to the top again, his arms beating the water, but with rapidly decreasing force.

The boat was drifting past Chess. Before the stranger could regain his seat and bring the craft about, Chess would surely sink again—probably for the last time.

Quick as a flash, the stranger swung one of the oars out toward the young man. With his last bit of strength, Chess caught hold and clung tightly as he was swept through the water to the boat's edge. Strong arms fastened upon him and dragged him over the side.

Ruth and her friends in the other dory reached the spot just as Chess slumped down in the bottom of the boat, a wet, almost lifeless heap.

"Is he all right?" Helen called anxiously.

"Hadn't we better use artificial respiration?" asked Ruth.

The figure on the bottom of the boat moved, and slowly Chess brought himself to a sitting position.

"I'm—all—right," he panted, with effort. "Thanks to my rescuer."

All eyes were immediately turned upon the stranger. He was not many years older than Tom and Chess, and his appearance was good in spite of his well-worn clothing.

"I was glad of the chance to help," he replied pleasantly.

"What happened?" Helen asked, after she had made sure that Chess was not injured.

"We don't know much about it ourselves," Tom offered. "The motor didn't work well all afternoon. Chess thought he could fix it. Suddenly we went up and overboard with a bang! That's the whole story."

Helen shuddered as she turned her eyes upon the boat from which the young men had escaped. The entire craft down to the surface of the water was ablaze.

"No use trying to save the boat," Tom observed.

"I should say not," Helen agreed. "There it goes down!"

As the girl spoke, the charred mass slowly

sank beneath the surface, the water extinguishing the remaining flames. Half-burned boards floating about were the only evidence of the accident.

"We must get back to shore," Ruth put in. "Tom and Chess are wet and need attention. First, however, we want to thank—this gentleman."

"My name—my name is Fred Orman," the young man said, fingering an oar nervously.

The others, and especially Chess, added their appreciation for Orman's aid. Ruth spoke again.

"When we reach shore we'll thank you properly, Mr. Orman. We'll be delayed by a lot of questions, if we don't hurry."

Already a number of boats which had been on the bay at the time of the explosion, but too far away to reach the scene quickly, were heading for the young people. Those on shore who could find means of doing so were also rowing out toward them.

"That's all right," and Orman smiled easily as he replied to Ruth. "I hope everything will be O. K."

"I'm sure it will, as soon as we get medical attention for Tom and Chess." Ruth's eyes swept the group of boats that had gathered about, and her eyes shone. "What a glorious scene for a picture!"

Tom, who was looking at Orman, thought he

saw a queer gleam in his eyes. The boats separated to return to shore, and Tom had no chance to say another word. Once out of earshot, Ruth said:

"I like that fellow. He seems down and out, but a perfect gentleman."

"I liked him, even if he was a little odd," Helen agreed. "I think we should give him a reward. He deserves it."

"And probably needs it," Tom put in, speaking for the first time. "If Chess doesn't do it first, I'm going to give him money."

Ruth smiled.

"If I'm any judge of character, he won't accept it."

Tom remained lost in thought for a time. Then he spoke slowly and deliberately.

"I've been thinking——"

"Yes?" Helen broke in, ever looking for an opportunity to tease.

Tom did not notice the interruption.

"I'm certain I've seen this Orman before," he stated. "And I believe he knew you, Ruth!"

CHAPTER III

RUTH'S SECRET

CHESS COPLEY and Fred Orman reached the shore slightly in advance of the second boat. Tom and the girls could see the two young men talking earnestly.

"Ruth, Orman is walking away!" Helen exclaimed. "And we haven't half thanked him! Why doesn't Chess stop him?"

Ruth, too, observed that the stranger, evidently to avoid meeting them, was walking rapidly down the beach. She was disappointed at not having an opportunity to question Orman, but she had not thought that Chess was responsible for the young man's abrupt departure.

"Never mind," she told her chum. "Perhaps we'll see him later."

As the boat touched the sand, Chess came to meet the party and to help beach the craft.

"Why didn't you ask Orman to wait?" Tom demanded.

"I did, and he wouldn't. I offered to reward him—luckily I didn't lose my purse when I went overboard—and he politely refused."

"Pride?" Ruth suggested.

"I suppose so. He insisted he had already been thanked enough. Then he walked off, and I couldn't very well block his path!"

"Of course not. If he didn't want to meet us, that's his business. But we'll keep our eyes open, and maybe we'll see him."

The throng on the shore gathered about the young people, to learn the details of the accident and to offer aid. Ruth insisted that Tom and Chess be bundled into an automobile and be taken immediately to their hotel. Tom's shoulder was not greatly burned, but gave him considerable pain.

"Have it wrapped up right away," Ruth directed.

After seeing Tom and Chess off, Ruth and Helen attempted to answer the many questions that were put to them. At length they too escaped and went directly to their own hotel. Helen called Chess on the telephone, and was relieved to learn that both young men were little the worse for the mishap.

"We're feeling fine," Chess declared over the telephone. "We'll be over in an hour or so, and prove it!"

Unfortunately, when Tom had applied for rooms at the hotel for their party, he found that he could not be under the same roof with his

sister and Ruth. The hotel was already pretty well filled, and Tom and Chess had had to go to a smaller but very good house, often used as a sort of annex, some little distance from the main hotel where Ruth and Helen were comfortably housed.

Later in the day, in the exclusive but quiet garden café of the big hotel where Ruth and Helen stayed, the four young people enjoyed a friendly chat.

"It is beautiful here," Ruth remarked as she took the chair Tom offered. "What a delightful view of the bay."

"Didn't look so beautiful to me an hour or so ago," Tom answered, grinning.

The waiter took the orders and soon returned with a tray of tea fancies, dainty sandwiches and candies.

"You always order too generously," Ruth protested to Tom. "Just the same, I'm not a bit sorry this time!"

The four chatted over the cups, and presently left the garden.

"What magazine is that in your pocket?" Ruth asked as they walked along the shore.

"One of your favorite motion picture magazines," Tom returned. "Want to read it?"

"Not now. If you're through with it, I'd like to take it to my room."

"Sure, I'm through. Take it along."

They walked on for a time, and at last Ruth announced her intention of returning.

"Ruth Fielding, I know you," Helen said firmly. "You want to get back to your writing."

"Writing?" This was news to Tom. "Say, Ruthie, you aren't starting another scenario, are you? This is your vacation."

"I may as well tell the secret, I suppose." Ruth noticed the worried expression on Tom's face. "When an idea grips me I'm in misery until I get it out of my system and down on paper. I don't believe you quite understand——"

"Yes, I do." Tom spoke quietly. "Ruth, I never refused——"

"You are a perfect dear to put up with my ambition, Tom. That's why I know you aren't going to protest at my latest venture."

"And what is that, pray?" Helen asked impatiently.

"I'm working on a scenario that I intend to enter in an international contest."

"International?" Chess whistled.

"The contest is promoted by a large moving picture concern, a leading magazine, and a publishing house. There's a prize of fifty thousand dollars offered."

"That's a lot of money," Helen gasped.

"The money isn't the most important thing.

Of course, I won't object to the prize, but I want the satisfaction of finding out whether or not I can write a winning scenario in competition with the best writers of the world."

"Well, you may do it, Ruth," Helen offered. "But you'll surely kill yourself."

"It won't be fun, I know. I haven't caught just the right sort of idea yet—I want something big, vital! The scenario cannot be carelessly thrown together. I must pay more attention than ever before to detail. Cedar Grove Bay is a wonderful place to work—it's so quiet."

"And we brought you here to rest!" Helen groaned.

"I don't intend to make a grind of myself. I'll put myself on a schedule and have regular hours for work and for play."

"I guess there isn't anything we can say," Tom remarked slowly.

He knew only too well that Ruth's new work would mean that a wedding upon which he had set his heart would be put off to a far date.

"I'll never stand in your way, Ruth," he finished. "And I haven't much thought that you won't win!"

"Tom—" Ruth's voice broke, but she hurried on. "It's wonderful to have good friends that understand and believe in you. I'm not very

confident that I'll win the contest. The scenario will be the most difficult one I've ever attempted."

"But you can do it, Ruth Fielding!" Realizing that it was useless to attempt to turn Ruth from her decision to enter the contest, Helen backed her friend whole-heartedly. "Tell us the plot."

"I can't. I haven't it worked out in my own head yet. I have some ideas that I think are good, but they don't satisfy me."

"Well, I wish you luck," Chess told Ruth. "And you needn't think we're going to let you lock yourself up in your room either."

"Which reminds me that I should be there now," Ruth laughed.

Tom, Chess and Helen went back with Ruth, and the latter left her friends in the lobby. She had been in her room only a few minutes when Helen came in.

"Sorry to bother you. Tom sent me up with this magazine you wanted. You forgot it."

"Thanks." Ruth took it from the hand of her chum. "You didn't bother me because I haven't started to write yet."

Carelessly, Ruth turned the pages of the magazine, glancing at the pictures of the stars, some of them men and women that had worked under her direction.

Suddenly she gave a low cry, her eyes glued to one of the pages.

"What is it, Ruth?" Helen hurried to her friend's side.

"See that group picture?"

"Yes. But——"

"And that man?" Ruth pointed.

"Fred Orman!"

"Exactly!" Ruth smiled into the eyes of her astonished chum. "He's a movie actor. Strange he didn't say so, for I'm certain he knew we were in the profession."

After Ruth's startling announcement, Helen gazed speechlessly at the picture in the magazine, which without a doubt was a likeness of the young man who had rescued Chess from the bay.

"What do you make of it, Ruth?"

"I don't know, but I intend to find out."

"He seemed so perfectly honest."

"And I'm sure he is," Ruth announced firmly. Seldom did the girl misjudge character. "The picture in this magazine is a reproduction of a scene taken several months ago. Obviously, he was working for a film company then and now, for some reason, he's out of work."

"He was loafing on the beach," Helen recalled. "His clothes were neat and clean but dreadfully worn. "But why should he be afraid of us?"

"Pride, I imagine. You remember he wouldn't take money from Chess. He feels degraded and doesn't want us to know."

"Ruth, sometimes I think you're a born detective."

"I'm just guessing."

"Well, it sounds like a pretty good guess to me. Now, I know you want to work, so I'll chase myself out and let you alone. I'm dying to tell Tom and Chess the news and find out if they can place this fellow."

In the days that followed, Ruth toiled faithfully at the scenario which she determined to enter in a great international contest for a prize of fifty thousand dollars. She often discussed various scenes and "shots" with Helen, and the latter declared that on paper, at least, the story was by far the best that Ruth had ever turned out.

"I'm introducing new ideas for various lighting effects," Ruth told Helen. "If I'm not mistaken, my plan will take care of technical troubles that have always bothered motion picture producers."

"Isn't it an awful job to think it all out?"

"I do have trouble working out the details in a satisfactory manner. I have a big storm scene that is to be the climax of the scenario. I'm not satisfied with the ordinary storm as pictured by most directors—I want my storm to be the most realistic ever filmed!"

"You want the audience to feel the rain—to hear the thunder!"

"Exactly," Ruth laughed. "I suppose I'm crazy on the subject, I talk about it so much."

Helen's answer was a hug.

Ruth tried to hold herself to a definite writing schedule, but she soon discovered that there were certain days when her work progressed rapidly and other days when she could not write a line that entirely satisfied her. And then there was Tom.

Never by word did the young man hint that Ruth's decision to take upon herself a gigantic task had discouraged him. Unintentionally, however, he went around with a long face—as Helen expressed it, "looking like Uncle Jabez when he paid the grocery bill."

Tom was blue, and Ruth knew it. She cared a great deal for him, otherwise she would never have consented to wear his ring. But Ruth was young, and a glorious future stretched before her. Then, too, Tom, who came from a wealthy family and had a fortune in his own name, had never shown inclination to buckle down to hard work until he had taken the position of business manager for Ruth's company.

"Cheer up, Tommy boy," she said lightly one afternoon as she came upon him, sitting gloomily

in the lobby of the hotel. "Why aren't you out playing tennis with Chess and Helen?"

"Two good reasons," Tom grinned. "First, when Chess and Helen are together, it's a case of 'two is company and three is a crowd.' And second—well, you know the other reason."

Ruth shook her head.

"Well, you know it isn't much fun for me to bum around unless you're along."

"I'm sorry, Tom." Ruth hesitated. "If you really want me to, I'll take that motor spin with you. I couldn't go yesterday when you asked me, but I have an hour to spare this afternoon."

Tom was instantly alert.

"The car waits without, at this very moment," he said with a sweeping bow.

"Not without gasoline, I hope," Ruth laughed.

Ruth went to her room to get her hat and returned almost immediately to take her seat at Tom's side in the automobile.

"I'm glad I came," the girl told herself as she saw Tom's face again assume cheerful lines. "Good old Tom! He does think a lot of me!"

Tom chose a pleasant, shady road that led deeper into the country and the timberland. The pretty cottages that characterized the outskirts of Cedar Grove Bay were soon left far to the rear.

Ruth, who was really tired after a strenuous day hammering at her typewriter, settled comfortably into her seat and breathed deeply.

"It's good to get out like this once in awhile," she said.

"I'll come after you every afternoon, if you'll let me," Tom offered quickly.

Ruth smiled broadly, but shook her head.

"I'm afraid I can't let you. What would happen to my scenario if I did?"

"I only wish——"

"Please, Tom," Ruth interrupted gently. "I think I know what you were going to say, and I don't blame you for wanting me to forget about scenario writing and ambition. But I can't. You have my promise—if you are content to wait."

"Ruth, I'll never say a word about your career," Tom protested. "Not even if you decide to open a moving picture studio on the moon! I only want you to know that when you're ready for a home, I'll be right at your doorstep—waiting."

The subject changed to a less personal one, and Ruth was soon lost in admiration of the sights along the road.

"Have you seen Orman since the day of the rescue?" Ruth asked presently.

Tom shook his head.

"I've been watching for him, too. Helen showed me the picture in the magazine."

"I feel sure the picture was a likeness of Orman."

"Seems to me I've seen him on location somewhere, Ruth. But I can't remember exactly when or where it was. His face is rather striking—one doesn't forget it easily."

Suddenly, Ruth clutched Tom by the arm. Almost instantly he slowed down the car.

"What is it?" he cried. "What did you see?"

"Stop the car, Tom, please."

With rapidity Tom obeyed the order, pushing down his clutch and easing on the brake. The instant the car stopped Ruth jumped out, followed by the wondering Tom.

"Look over there," Ruth directed, pointing back a short distance and to one side of the road. "It's disgusting! Positively disgusting! The big coward!"

Tom trained his eyes in the direction that Ruth pointed and he too saw what it was that had aroused the girl's indignation. Not far from the road, in the timber where the trees and bushes partially hid them from the sight of those who passed on the highway, were two men—fighting.

The mere fact that two men were fighting would not have been sufficient to have made Ruth Fielding interfere, notwithstanding that she loathed fistic combat. There had been times in her own experience when Tom had been called

upon in grave situations to fight for his own rights. She understood that there were certain occasions and certain types of men that could be dealt with only by physical force. But it was clear that this fight was not a fair one, and Ruth believed in fair play.

The fight was between a heavy-set, tall man, and a short, slender young fellow. The younger man was much the lighter of the two and of course had little chance against his more favored opponent.

"Ruth," Tom cried quickly, "isn't that small fellow Orman?"

Ruth strained her eyes to catch a closer glimpse of the face.

"I do believe—yes, it is!"

"The dirty whelp!" Tom exploded. "A big fellow like that jumping on a man half his size!"

"Oh, Tom," Ruth fairly wailed, "isn't there something we can do? Orman will be killed!"

"I'm going to stop that fight!" Tom cried, and sprang forward.

Ruth, who was no coward, followed Tom as he made for the fence that separated them from the two men.

"Oh!" Ruth cried an instant later, and stopped in horror.

The heavier man had deliberately placed a hard blow, striking Orman on his head. Orman

crumbled in a heap on the ground and remained still.

"Stop—you!" Tom shouted in anger.

With one bound he was over the fence. The burly man looked up and saw Ruth and Tom for the first time. He hesitated, looked down at the body at his feet, then turned and fled.

"Don't let him get away!" Ruth called, as she, too, endeavored to climb the fence.

But pursuit was impossible. The fleeing man had the start over Tom, and was lost in the bushes before either Ruth or Tom could see who he was. Tom returned from a brief chase, just as Ruth reached Orman's side.

She dropped on her knees before the motionless figure of the man. His face was deathly white, and he remained still as the girl touched him.

CHAPTER IV

A SCOUNDREL AT LARGE

RUTH FIELDING knew exactly what to do when she found Fred Orman unconscious from the blow delivered by an unknown man, for, as our old readers know, she had served as a Red Cross nurse at the war front. She gave terse orders, and Tom flew about getting water and aiding her.

They placed the young man in a more comfortable position, and peered anxiously down upon him, watching for the first signs of returning life.

"Think he'll come around all right?" Tom asked.

Ruth nodded her head.

"The blow was a hard one. See, there's a nasty cut over his left eye. If you'll give me your handkerchief——"

Tom complied with the request, and Ruth accomplished the best sort of bandage that she could under the circumstance.

"It's a wonder he wasn't killed," she continued. "I think he's coming around now."

The body on the ground stirred slightly, and two hands began to move restlessly, and then to clinch and strike out.

"You—you scoundrel," they heard him whisper.

Ruth and Tom looked at each other in wonder. The young man opened his eyes, and his hand sought his head.

"Where am I?"

"There was a fight—" Tom began.

"Oh, yes, I remember now." A hard gleam came into the eyes of the man. "I tried to knock him out—but I guess he got me instead!"

The idea of a small man like Orman seriously thinking of attempting to knock out a man of huge proportions, made Tom smile. Then he became serious again as it occurred to him that Orman was indeed a game sort.

"Hollister—he got away, I suppose?" The young man attempted to raise himself to a sitting position as he asked the question.

"Hollister? Was that who it was?" Ruth asked.

"Yes. Dean Hollister. I have an account to settle with him!"

"Can't you tell us about it?" Ruth suggested gently, in a tone that invited confidence. "We're

deeply interested, you know, because we're in the same profession."

"You knew that I was a movie actor?"

"We didn't know, but we thought you were," Ruth said, and briefly explained.

When she finished, Fred Orman, in an easier manner, began to talk. It seemed to relieve his mind to unburden it to the two who appeared to be his friends.

"I didn't want you to know that I was a movie actor because—but wait. I'll begin at the beginning. Hollister is a scoundrel!"

Orman's eyebrows knitted together in a tiny frown.

"He ought to be in jail!"

Ruth nodded encouragingly.

"I was with the Goodwell Film Company. A small company, as you know, but I held a good position, and my chance for advancement was excellent. I thought everything was to be smooth sailing; but I found out differently. Dean Hollister came to work for the company, and then things started to happen."

"What sort of a position did he have?" Ruth asked curiously.

"He worked on continuity and fixed up weak scenarios. Then, from time to time, little thefts were discovered. Dean Hollister was around at the time, but at first I thought nothing of it."

Tom nodded his head significantly.

"I never liked Hollister, although I had nothing particular against him. Then the thefts began in my department, and finally circumstantial evidence made it look as though I had committed the crimes. I was accused by Hollister, and I couldn't prove my innocence. His word was taken against mine, and I was discharged. Now, using the stock phrase, I'm 'at liberty'."

"You suspect Hollister of the crimes?" Ruth asked.

"Yes; from what I observed and from what I know of the man and his methods, I am positive he is the guilty party."

"What made him come to Cedar Grove Bay?" Tom asked.

"I don't know," Orman replied, with a puzzled frown. "I had no idea he was in this vicinity until I ran across him a little while ago. You saw what happened. I'd follow that man all over the world! I want to corner him and make him confess, so that I can clear myself."

He looked regretfully at his slender body.

"If I were only larger—stronger——"

"I'd say you were pretty game to tackle a man his size," Tom returned admiringly.

"I'd tackle almost anything," came grimly from Orman, "if only I could prove my innocence."

The bump on the young man's head was swelling and he had received a few annoying scratches and cuts; but he did not appear seriously injured. With Tom's aid he got to his feet.

"Feel pretty wobbly, don't you?"

Fred Orman smiled ruefully.

"A little shaky in the legs." He took a few steps, swaying slightly. He turned to face Ruth and Tom.

"I shouldn't have troubled you with my story," he said a trifle stiffly.

Fred Orman was again the proud actor. This time, however, Ruth and Tom understood that it was hurt pride alone that made the man distant.

"Your story has interested us," Ruth assured him.

"You can't go off that way," Tom declared. "You're not in fit shape. We'll take you home."

"Which direction do you go?" Ruth questioned.

"I have a room at Cedar Grove."

"Fine! Miss Fielding and I are headed for there now. We'll give you a lift."

"I would like a ride."

Ruth, Tom, and Fred Orman made their way to the automobile. Tom started the motor, skillfully turned in the narrow road, and began the ride back to the seaside resort. Ruth tried to draw Orman into conversation, but while he an-

swered the girl's questions in a polite manner, she soon realized that he was in no mood to talk.

"Poor fellow," she thought. "He's sick at heart, and battered in body, as well as in spirit. I'll venture he hasn't had much to eat, either, and needs money."

Ruth, too, relapsed into silence, for she was trying to think of a way she could help the man without offending his pride. She would have liked to tell Tom how she felt, but she could not as long as Orman was in the car.

"Tom," she said presently, "do you know, I'm half starved. Helen brought me a sandwich for luncheon, but it was a pretty light meal."

Tom glanced from his wheel in amazement. Then he caught Ruth's eye and was quick to see the point of her remark.

"Why didn't you yell sooner? I know just the place. It isn't foxy, but they serve wonderful dinners."

"Fine," Ruth agreed.

Orman said nothing.

At Cedar Grove Bay Tom drove directly to a quiet and clean but not extravagant restaurant.

"Here!" he cried, as Orman prepared to leave them. "You can't go yet—we're not through talking. And we want to take you home. Come on in and wait while Ruth gets a bite to eat."

Tom's way of putting it made it difficult for

the young man to protest. Tom took him by the arm, and Ruth was delighted to see that her old friend and comrade understood her plan perfectly. Once inside the café, Tom ordered for three with a lavish hand, ignoring Orman's protest.

"Aren't we in the same profession?" Tom demanded. "Can't I treat once?"

As Ruth toyed with her own food, she was pleased to notice that Orman ate with evident hunger. She had another plan in her head, too, and she hoped that Tom would again understand.

But Tom had the same idea, and at a time when the stranger's attention was diverted, he took a bill from his pocket and tapped it significantly. Ruth nodded her head violently.

They left the café, Tom paying the check, and already Orman seemed more cheerful, more at ease. He gave his address to Tom, and a few minutes later the car stopped before a clean but cheap rooming house near the docks.

"It isn't a very nice place," Orman admitted regretfully. "The fact is, I've been going from bad to worse luck. No one wants a down-and-outer."

Ruth realized from experience in the motion picture business that Orman spoke the bitter truth. It was difficult enough for a well-dressed person to get past the gateman—a poorly at-

tired, discouraged individual certainly had less chance.

"I traveled from one place to another without luck. Then I came down here, thinking I could find work in a different line."

"Did you find anything?"

"Not yet. I intend to keep on trying, though."

"That's the fight," Tom encouraged.

"We'll help you, if we can," added Ruth, with an encouraging smile.

"And while you're looking about," Tom went on, taking a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket, "here's something to tide you over the rough weather."

Orman began to protest.

"It isn't a gift," Tom told him. "Only a loan."

The young movie actor hesitated for a moment longer, then slowly he reached out his hand and took the money. He turned and faced Ruth as well as Tom. His voice choked a trifle.

"Some day, when I get on my feet again, I'll pay you back with interest!"

Then he turned from them and entered his rooming house without looking back.

CHAPTER V

AN IDEA TAKES ROOT

THE following morning, Ruth and Helen found that the usual sunny weather of Cedar Grove Bay had given way to rain and gloom.

"Oh, dear," Helen sighed. "Isn't this the most beastly weather?"

Ruth looked up from her writing desk.

"You mean beastly because it's raining cats and dogs?" she teased.

Helen withered her with a glance.

"Chess and I were to play tennis again," she informed her chum. "He beat me at love sets yesterday, and I must have my revenge."

"Love sets," Ruth giggled. "How interesting! Am I to take you literally?"

"Ruth Fielding, one of these days I will challenge you to a duel."

"Don't get peeved."

"Even if I am engaged, I don't go mooning around. Chess and I are just as sensible as we always were."

"Of course, dear," Ruth replied soothingly. "I just said that because this morning love happens to be the subject foremost in my mind."

"Tom?"

"No, not Tom." It was Ruth's turn to glare. "I meant my scenario."

"You're writing a love story?" Helen asked with interest, for Ruth had told her little of the plot.

Ruth was looking thoughtfully out of the window, watching the huge raindrops that trickled down the glass. She bit the end of her pencil, and looked musingly at Helen.

"What would you do if another woman should fall in love with Chess?"

"My word!" Helen was utterly astonished. "Ruth, what in the world will you think of next? How ridiculous!"

"Granted," Ruth smiled. "But just the same —what would you do?"

"Oh, dear me, I don't know. I might go and tell the other woman to leave my property alone —and then I might not. I never thought of it before!"

"It's worth considering," Ruth told her sagely. "There are a lot of women in the world that aren't as fortunate as we."

"I can't see what you're driving at."

"Nothing in particular," Ruth laughed. "So

don't be alarmed. Chess is perfectly safe! The subject is to be the basis of my scenario."

"Another case of 'The Eternal Triangle'?"

"Not exactly. This is the story of unselfish love, the story of two sisters who fall in love with the same man. I think I have an original treatment."

"Anything you turn your hand to is original," Helen remarked as she walked to the window. "I believe it's clearing up."

"Hope so. I'm tired of being shut up here when I ought to be able to go out on the beach."

"Well, come on to luncheon," Helen pleaded. "I'm starving, and I'm sure you can't turn out a fifty thousand dollar idea without brain food."

The fact that the stars of Ruth's own company were also taking a vacation, made it possible for the girl to devote her entire attention to the scenario. The time when the manuscript must be in the mail was approaching, and the girl was working like mad to finish it. Some days she worked in her own hotel room, but more often she went to a favorite nook on the cliff.

Tom enjoyed being with her as she wrote, and as Ruth found that he did not bother her by trying to draw her into a conversation, she permitted him to idle at her side. He usually brought a book and pretended to read, but Ruth noticed that he mostly pretended. More than once she

would glance up to find his eyes resting seriously upon her.

Chess and Helen had been forbidden her company on these days when she worked, for they both had a tendency to chatter, and this often disturbed Ruth's train of thought.

Helen had predicted that the rain would stop, and she was gratified when the clouds passed and the sun came out again. The tennis courts were too wet to permit use, but Chess called for Helen, and they went for a walk along the cliffs. After a time they sat down on one of the rocks overlooking the water.

"Won't be long now until I'll be leaving," Chess remarked slyly, watching Helen's face.

Helen looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"Must go back to work. I'm a business man, and I can't loaf around forever. I'd like to, though."

"It's been a wonderful vacation," Helen said a trifle regretfully.

Of course she had known that Chess must go back to his work in the city, for he held a responsible position and could not afford to shirk his duty. Nevertheless, she hated to think of saying good-bye. Chess put out his hand and took Helen's.

"You don't want me to go, do you?"

"We-ll," Helen wavered between truth and policy. "Perhaps I'll get a rest after you're gone!" she taunted.

"No, you won't," Chess chuckled, highly pleased, for he understood Helen well enough to know that she was trying to hide her real feelings, "because I'll write every day, and it will keep you busy answering."

"Hear the boy rave!" Helen taunted, but not without pleasure at Chess and his confidence in himself. "Chess, you should be ashamed of yourself. Ruth and Tom don't act that way!"

"Well, if you ask me, I've about given up the thought that they'll ever get married."

"I haven't! I know Tom and I also know Ruth! Their feeling for each other is something that you don't find every day!"

"Ruth has almost too many business problems. I tell you, woman's place is in the home!"

"Or on a magazine cover," Helen cut in. "Bosh! Let me tell you, the modern woman can do something besides wash dishes and darn socks. And, young man, if you think your wife must stay in a one-room——"

"Now Helen, you know I didn't mean that the way it sounded," Chess protested, in alarm. "I was speaking in general terms. If you'll only marry me, you know I'll let you boss me——"

"Well, maybe!" Helen laughed into the young

man's face. "Never mind, I appreciate that you aren't such a demon as you pretend."

"That sounds better."

"One of these days we'll have that big double wedding. Right now, I'm afraid Ruth thinks almost as much of her career as she does of my twin brother."

"Well, Ruth has enough money to be independent!" Chess said thoughtfully.

"That shows you don't know Ruth Fielding!" Helen flared, instantly ready to defend her friend. "You wouldn't say anything like that if you did!"

Chess, again finding himself in error, hastily began to modify his statement.

"Money has absolutely nothing to do with Ruth's attitude toward Tom," Helen went on severely. "Her career is a vital thing to Ruth, and she loves the work. Let me tell you, she's done more to put clean motion pictures on the screen than any other young writer!"

"I know she's an outstanding figure," Chess protested again. "And the squarest kid in the world." He felt that he had indeed put himself in hot water.

"Then the argument is over," Helen laughed, ready to make peace. "If we agree that Ruth Fielding is the most wonderful girl in the country, I'm satisfied."

"Not that!" Chess replied meaningly, and

Helen seemed perfectly content to accept the implied exception.

"Where is Ruth this afternoon?" Chess asked, after a short silence. "I haven't seen her."

"Shouldn't wonder but what she's gone to her favorite spot on the cliff. She insisted that she must work on her scenario again."

As Helen spoke, she turned her face toward the distant spot, where Ruth was often found.

"Yes, there she is," Helen said, as Chess too turned his eyes toward the cliff.

"Ruth!" Helen shouted, but of course her voice would not carry that distance, and the other girl did not look in the direction of her friends.

Then, as the two watched, they saw Ruth get up from her seat on the rock, hesitate, and begin to pick her way hastily down the steep slope that led to the beach.

"I wonder what Ruth's up to now?" Helen asked.

CHAPTER VI

TROUBLE AHEAD

FROM her position on the rock overlooking the beach, Ruth Fielding observed a young man walking slowly along the water front. It was Fred Orman.

"I wonder what luck he's had since I last saw him?" Ruth asked herself. "I have a notion to go down and talk to him."

Ruth was not a girl that allowed convention or silly pride to stand in her way, especially when she felt that some one needed help. She had a perfectly good excuse for wishing to meet Orman, and she intended to avail herself of the opportunity.

She picked up her writing material, jumped up from the seat on the rock, and began to descend the slope. The path she selected was the same one that she and Helen had taken on the day the kicker engine in Chess and Tom's boat exploded, but this time the girl picked her way cautiously and with less rapidity.

Ruth had spent most of the afternoon on the

cliff, making the best of the inviting sunshine. She was forcing herself to work with greater speed than ever before, as the day approached when her scenario must be in the mail if it was to be accepted for the contest.

"Hope he doesn't leave the beach before I get there," Ruth thought, and she began to hurry down the slope.

She found Fred Orman leaning, with hands in his pockets, against the side of a boathouse. When he saw Ruth come toward him, he straightened and removed his cap.

"I wanted to see you," Ruth began quickly, a trifle out of breath. "How are things going? Has your luck changed?"

The young man shook his head and mustered a smile.

"My luck hasn't changed—yet. And the only thing that goes is my money."

"Don't get discouraged. Have you no prospect of work?"

"I'm trying my hardest to connect with a new company that is organizing, but, so far, I haven't been successful."

"What company is that?"

"The Dowall Motion Picture Company."

"I've heard of it. I understand the company has strong backing. It ought to make good, and in a few years become fairly outstanding."

"I'm far from sure I'll land the place," Orman went on, with a worried frown. "They keep putting me off. Can't seem to put the deal across. I'm not much of a talker—not much good, I guess."

"Nonsense!" Ruth spoke almost sharply. "You're letting hard luck get the best of you. Don't lose your pep and punch! I'll venture to say you'll have a position within a week."

"You think I shall, Miss Fielding?" Fred Orman brightened at the encouraging words and turned his cap nervously in his hands.

"I'm sure of it," Ruth repeated firmly. "I know the manager of the company," she added. "If you want me to, I'll write him a letter this very day and recommend you."

"Miss Fielding, if you'll do that for me—" the young man almost choked on the words—"I'll never forget the service!"

"It's nothing at all," Ruth said easily.

"There's nothing that takes the fight, the life, out of a man like defeat," Orman went on in a low voice. "I felt beaten, hopelessly crushed, until you encouraged me. Now, I'm going after that job—and I'll get it!"

"Of course you will," Ruth agreed, delighted that she had made Orman come out of the mood of depression.

Fred Orman, with his shoulders thrown back,

his head in the air, was a different man now. Ruth knew only too well that in his former frame of mind he would have no chance to impress an employer with his ability.

"How does your head feel?" Ruth questioned. "The blow wasn't a light one, and I was a little afraid——"

"I'm pretty thick skulled, I guess. Had a headache for a while, but that's gone now."

"Have you seen Hollister since the fight?"

Orman shook his head regretfully.

"He seems to have dropped off the map. I'm afraid he's left Cedar Grove Bay, and my time has been wasted. I've haunted the places where I thought I might chance upon him, but I've never found him."

"Strange that the man should come to this place unless he wanted to take a vacation," Ruth mused thoughtfully. "I'm sure I don't know the fellow, and yet I can't get him out of my mind. I feel uncomfortable every time I think of him."

"You can bank on it, he didn't come here for a vacation," Orman said bitterly. "That man is up to something."

After a few minutes Ruth said good-bye to the young man and he turned away. The girl stood by the boathouse, looking after him.

"Hi there, Ruth! Why the rush down the

mountain? You nearly started an avalanche!"

Helen and Chess, burned by curiosity at Ruth's action, had, in a more leisurely fashion, followed her to the beach.

"And this is the avalanche coming down upon me now, I suppose," Ruth drawled.

"Tom will be ready to commit a murder if you make a point of talking to every good looking young man you see."

"Let me tell you, Chess Copley, Tom has more sense than to ever think of getting jealous," Ruth laughed, blushing, however. She felt that her action required no explanation, and she disliked to give one. "I was talking to Fred Orman."

"Don't mind Chess," Helen said, pinching the arm of her escort. "He's in a wicked mood today, and looking for a fight. Wish I'd seen Orman myself. I only saw him once and might not recognize him again, I was so excited at the time."

"Thinking she might lose me," Chess grinned. "If you want your ring back——"

"Ouch! Quit pinching me! I'll be good!"

"You'd better! I was just trying to recall," Helen went on. "He had a very striking face, but he was short, wasn't he?" Chess was tall.

"Yes," Ruth agreed. "But diamonds come wrapped up in small packages. There's something to that fellow, and I intend to help him if I can."

"Orman strikes me as a fine fellow," Chess put in. "If there's anything I can do, let me know. Money or——"

"We want to put him on his own feet so that he can earn his own money."

"I agree with you there," Helen remarked. "How did the scenario go to-day?"

"Rather well. But it scares me to death when I think of the work that remains to be done and the little time to do it in."

"You're turning it over to a continuity writer, I suppose?" Helen questioned.

"No, I shall do everything myself. This is to be the best thing I've ever produced, and I will leave nothing to the hands of others."

"How that girl loves work," Helen groaned.

"What worries me now is the expense. The scenes are elaborate—they must be elaborate to carry out the idea. And it costs!"

"Modern producers aren't turning out cheap pictures these days," Helen observed.

"The public insists upon the best, and should. In the long run, a producer usually makes more from a great picture, even though it does cost a lot to film it."

The three turned away from the boathouse to return to the girls' hotel. They had taken but a few steps when Ruth stopped short and clutched Helen by the arm.

"Wait!" she whispered.

Both Chess and Helen came to an abrupt halt, glancing in surprise at Ruth. Her eyes were fastened upon a moving figure far down the beach. Even as Helen and Chess observed the man, they saw him disappear into an old building.

"What's the matter?" Helen asked. "Who is he, Ruth?"

Ruth Fielding was silent for a moment.

"I don't know for sure," she said at last; "but I think it was Dean Hollister!"

"You didn't see his face!"

"Neither on the day of the fight nor just now. But I'll never forget the build of that huge man."

"You may have been mistaken," Chess suggested.

"I hope so; because if Hollister is still here it means trouble ahead for some one. But let's forget about it," she added, more lightly.

Nevertheless, the girl relapsed into thoughtful silence.

CHAPTER VII

RUTH GAINS ATMOSPHERE

"RUTH, you'll never guess what Tom's up to now!"

Helen Cameron, convulsed with laughter, dropped down upon the davenport in the writing room of the hotel. Ruth, who sat at one of the desks penning a letter to an old-time college friend, Jennie Stone, now Mrs. Henri Marchand, stopped writing.

"There, you've made me blot it! Helen, you bounce around like a rubber ball."

"Hope I don't look like one." Helen regarded herself critically in the long mirror. "If you say the word, I'll start dieting."

"Don't!" Ruth pleaded, with a groan. "Be original! Every woman in the world is trying to imitate a shadow, it seems to me. You're exactly right as you are. But tell me the joke. What is Tom doing?"

"You haven't heard his latest hobby?"

"No, I haven't, I told you once. What *is* he doing? I hope he hasn't entirely destroyed the family dignity."

"Oh, no," Helen giggled. "He's upholding it. Thinks he's Sir Launcelot—a defender of the ladies."

"What?"

Ruth had a vision of Tom, mounted on a sway-back farm steed, imitating one of the characters of King Arthur's Court.

"He's taking boxing lessons."

Ruth looked puzzled.

"Well, what's wrong with that? Why call him Sir Launcelot? I think it's fine for Tom to know how to defend himself in a scientific manner."

"Wait until you hear the reason for this gallant effort."

"I'm waiting."

"Since you saw Hollister hanging around the beach, Tom has worried himself into believing that perhaps the big, bad man is working out a naughty plot against our little Ruth. Tom says he doesn't feel he's a match for Hollister, and he wants to be prepared in case anything happens! Such devotion! If Chess would only worry that way about me!"

Helen giggled again and looked expectantly at Ruth, but the girl did not laugh.

"Tom's reason does seem a trifle farfetched," she said. "Just the same, Helen, I think Tom is right—in the basic idea, at least. I have no rea-

son to thing Hollister ever heard of me, and yet, like Tom, I feel uneasy. If you could have seen that man——"

"I've heard so much about him," Helen remarked, "that I'm almost looking forward to an introduction."

"What stories has that twin sister of mine been telling you, Ruth?"

Both girls glanced up to see that Tom had entered the public room, evidently in search of them. Helen got up from her chair, went to her brother, and with exaggerated admiration began to examine the muscles of his arm.

"Ruth, allow me to introduce you to your self-appointed protector."

Helen delighted to tease her twin brother, especially when she saw that it embarrassed him. Yet, should another person slur Tom, Helen would instantly declare war.

"Young lady," Tom began severely, uncomfortable in the light that Helen had put him in, "you're the one that's going to need a protector! If you weren't a lady——"

"Thanks for the compliment," Helen smiled sweetly.

"What would you do if you had a sister like that, Ruth?"

Ruth felt that Helen had carried the joke far enough.

"Tom, I think it's fine for you to take up boxing, Hollister or no Hollister. You've always been able to defend yourself, but the science of any game is always worth learning. I wish it was considered proper for girls to take up boxing, too!"

"Some do," Helen announced.

"I know," Ruth smiled. "But I don't consider 'Ruth Fielding, Prize Fighter,' an exactly appropriate title."

"Well, you fight lots of mental battles!"

Tom turned toward Ruth, and, as he faced her, the fun entirely left his voice.

"I suppose it does sound silly, Ruth. Hollister looked to me like a pretty tough customer. I felt that Orman may want my help some time. While I don't intend to meddle in his affairs——"

"If Hollister is the monstrous thrashing machine you folks make out he is," Helen interrupted, "he'll make mincemeat of both of you—boxing lessons or none."

"Another thing," Tom went on, addressing Ruth. "Did it occur to you that Hollister must have heard of you? He's in the moving picture business, you know."

"What if he has?"

"How about wishing to interfere with you and your work? You have rivals who have not

stopped at employing underhand agents before this. What is he doing around here, anyway? He is not vacationing, or we should have met him. Maybe he has some scheme of his own."

The same thought had entered Ruth's head, but as she had no evidence to support the belief, she had attempted to forget the entire affair.

"You may be right," Ruth thoughtfully agreed. "I'm going to avoid him, at all events. And until my scenario is finished I won't worry about it."

The days passed quickly for Ruth and her friends, and in spite of the work on the scenario, the young people managed many delightful outings together. They went on picnics, and, for the time being, Tom forgot his blues and Chess banished the thought of the day when he must return to the city.

Tom and Chess attempted to relieve Ruth of all anxiety, by promising to keep an eye out for Hollister. Once Tom went to Fred Orman's rooming house for a talk with the young man, but found that the young movie actor was out.

One evening Tom, Helen, and Chess planned to attend a show at one of the local moving picture theaters. Ruth refused to accompany them, for though the picture, "The Crimson Revolt," was one that Mr. Hammond had produced, the girl felt that she could not spare the time.

"I've played around too much lately," she said regretfully. "You go on without me."

Helen and Chess obeyed cheerfully, but Tom went grudgingly, declaring that it was no fun to go without Ruth.

Left alone, Ruth "dug" into the work that was before her. She wrote and she rewrote, but not until she started to labor on the storm scene, did she encounter any great difficulty. Then page after page she ripped from the typewriter, for the work did not please her.

"Stupid!" Ruth cried as she scrambled up another page and tossed it in the waste paper basket. "I can do better! I know I can!"

She walked to the window and looked out. Rain was beginning to beat against the pane, for a storm had come up quickly. Ruth had been so engrossed in her work that she had failed to notice. Lightning flashed across the sky, to be followed by rumbling thunder.

Ruth had never been afraid of storms. There was something about them that thrilled her. She hesitated only a moment, then she ran to the clothes closet and grabbed up an old hat and her slicker. Ruth was going after atmosphere for the big scene of her scenario!

Helen said good night to Chess and Tom and then came up to the room she shared with Ruth.

Though Chess had called a taxicab when he found that it was raining, Helen discovered to her chagrin that her dress was spotted in several places from the drops that had splashed on her as she bolted from the cab to the hotel. Helen disliked storms. Nevertheless she and the two young men went into the café, and it was well past midnight when the girl went to her room.

She opened the door, switched on the light, expecting to find Ruth asleep. Instead, as she turned her eyes toward the bed, she was startled to see that it had not been used. The covers were in perfect order and Ruth had not slept there.

"Where in the world could she have gone at this time of night?" Helen wondered.

She did not know what to do. Perhaps Ruth had only gone downstairs to the lobby, and in that case it would be silly to telephone the boys. As Helen debated, the door opened and Ruth entered. She tossed a hat into a chair and began to get out of her wet slicker.

"Ruth Fielding! Where on earth have you been?"

"I'll admit it looks as though I've been swimming in the bay," Ruth retorted, laughing merrily.

"You nearly frightened me to death!"

"Nothing to be alarmed about. Oh, Helen,

it was a glorious storm!" Ruth's entire face lighted up.

"Glorious?" Helen was doubtful.

"The climax of my scenario is to be a storm scene. And, let me tell you, it's to be a realistic one! I got my atmosphere to-night!"

"You went out alone late at night in the storm? Ruth, you take risks."

"Not a great risk. I went to the cliffs where I could see the waves beat up against the rock. It was thrilling! I'm going to get it down on paper this very instant."

Using a pencil instead of a typewriter, so that she would not disturb Helen, who wished to sleep, Ruth seated herself at her desk. When Helen lost consciousness, Ruth was still scribbling away at a furious rate, and it was three o'clock before she got to bed.

Ruth believed that her storm scene rang true, and after reading it over the next morning, she was still convinced that the work was good.

The scenario was nearly finished now, and Ruth felt that she was accomplishing as much as she should. Perhaps that fact influenced her when Mrs. Vanderwalker called upon her one afternoon and requested that she aid with the fashionable charity ball that was to be given at Cedar Grove Bay. As Ruth now recalled, she had been warned by Helen that Mrs. Vanderwalker, who

was the leader of the fashionable set, would make the request; but the matter had been crowded from her mind. Ruth found Mrs. Vanderwalker a delightful and charming lady.

"Your aid would mean a great deal," Mrs. Vanderwalker told her honestly. "You will be relieved of all burdensome work, if you will only lend your support."

The cause was a worthy one, and Ruth really liked Mrs. Vanderwalker. But demands on her time were heavy.

"I shall be pleased to help you," she gave in at last.

"And may we use your name? It carries weight, you know."

"If my name will help you, use it."

As soon as Mrs. Vanderwalker was out of hearing distance, Helen, who had lingered in the background during the interview, promptly pounced upon her chum and delivered a bear hug.

"Ruth Fielding, you're stepping up in the social world."

"That wasn't why I promised to help."

"Ruthie dear, don't I know that? Just the same, it *was* Mrs. Vanderwalker that asked you, and you can't get around that!"

"If I help with the ball, it means I must get to work on my scenario this very instant." Ruth

gathered up her writing materials. "I'm off for my favorite place on the cliff. See you at dinner time."

Ruth hurried from the hotel and to the nook which she had come to regard almost as her private property. For an hour she devoted herself to her manuscript.

"Disgusting!" she told herself. Again she had struck a snag, and the work was not progressing as it should.

She tore a half dozen sheets in two and tossed them aside. Some days ideas just came—and on other days they would not come! In glancing through her notebook she came upon old scribblings already incorporated in the typewritten part of the manuscript. These she also tore out and threw away. Then she sat for a long time, thoughtfully chewing on the end of her pencil. Finally she began to write.

She had struck the right idea at last! Faster and faster her pencil flew over the paper.

"This is good," Ruth thought. She had taught herself to judge accurately the value of her own work. "I'll rush right back to the hotel and get my ideas down on my machine while I'm in the writing mood. My fire doesn't burn like this every day!"

Ruth scrambled to her feet, neglecting in her excitement the torn pages that she had ripped

from the notebook and that had lodged between the cracks of the rock.

She hurried quickly toward the hotel, never once glancing back as she walked. Had she turned her head she might have seen Dean Hollister make his way to the rock where she had been writing.

The man had watched Ruth Fielding for some time, and had observed her discard the notebook pages. He reached the rock even before the girl was out of sight, and, with an exclamation of pleasure, stooped and picked up the papers.

"So Ruth Fielding is at last writing another scenario," he mused. "It will be worth my time to watch that young woman! She's the big bull's-eye in the film field to-day. Perhaps Dean Hollister will be able to catch on to an idea or two that will be worth while."

Chuckling to himself, the man slipped the papers into his pocket and walked away.

CHAPTER VIII

BUSINESS BEFORE PLEASURE

"ANY mail for me to-day, Helen?"

"Did you say m-a-l-e?" Helen Cameron giggled as she took her seat at the luncheon table at Ruth's side.

"Helen, I'm afraid you've degenerated terribly this summer. You're always think of men."

"This is my vacation and I'm not thinking at all. Please don't throw such big words at me—you sound like Webster."

"That's a compliment. I see you do have some letters. Hand them over!"

Helen, who had wished to keep Ruth in suspense, produced two letters that had arrived on the morning mail train, and had been handed to her by the hotel clerk just before she entered the dining room to meet her chum.

"Both for you. Guess my friends have forgotten me."

"Probably duns."

"Duns, nothing!" Helen retorted. "We all know Ruth Fielding pays her debts as she goes along. More likely, it's an editor wanting you

to contribute to his magazine or a director begging for help."

Ruth glanced at the postmarks.

"From Aunt Alvirah and Uncle Jabez!"

"Must be something important or Uncle Jabez wouldn't waste the postage," Helen offered.

"Well, it isn't," Ruth announced a moment later, after she had glanced over the first letter, written in the cramped style of Uncle Jabez Potter. "But he's dreadfully put out because he's had to pay so much for repairs and for help at the Red Mill."

"Trust him not to pay too much."

"Even though he's rich," Ruth sighed, "a dollar looks as big as ever to him."

Since Ruth had gained financial independence, the stinginess of her uncle had ceased to give her great concern. Ruth knew that, below the crusty surface, her uncle really had a great deal of affection not only for her, but for his faithful housekeeper. Her success in business had forced him to regard her with respect and a trifle of awe. His letter was a formal one and he expressed no sentiment for the girl.

Ruth eagerly opened the second letter, which was from Aunt Alvirah Boggs, and Helen, who watched her as she read, thought that she was dangerously near tears.

"Listen to this, Helen. She says one of the pictures I made months and months ago, 'The Eternal Turmoil,' was shown at the theater in Cheslow last week!"

"Imagine that! Ruth, I'll bet the whole town turned out! For once the manager probably made some money."

"You haven't heard the best part of it. Uncle Jabez took Aunt Alvirah!"

"Ruth, the world must be coming to an end! Aunt Alvirah certainly is stepping out for a woman her age. And Uncle Jabez—well, I can't imagine him putting out that much money!"

"Uncle Jabez really thinks a lot of her," Ruth smiled, "although he doesn't always show it."

"I suppose you think he doesn't give a rap about you. Probably he went to the show just because Aunt Alvirah wanted to go. Oh, yes—like fun!"

"She calls the picture 'pretty'," Ruth went on, smiling as she again glanced at the letter. "I'm afraid she wasn't in a very critical attitude. Too bad the public in general isn't the same way."

"Any other news in the letter?"

"No, Aunt Alvirah was so impressed with the picture show that it crowded other things out of her mind. She says the seats were 'hard on the back' though."

Helen smiled as she thought of the gentle old woman whose only protest at her lot in life was

voiced in her repeated expression, "Oh, my back! and, oh, my bones!"

The girls turned their attention to the menu and gave their orders to the waiter. While they were waiting for the luncheon to be served, they chatted together and amused themselves by watching the smartly dressed people who went in and out of the dining room. Ruth and Helen were lunching alone, for Tom and Chess had been called away on another engagement.

"Chess is leaving to-morrow," Helen dropped presently.

Ruth glanced up from her salad in surprise.

"You mean his vacation is over? He isn't coming back?"

"Just a business trip," Helen told her. "Has to go to New York for a few days. I believe Tom is thinking of going with him."

"I haven't seen Tom during the last twenty-four hours," Ruth admitted; "so I'm behind in the news. Tom was telling me the other day that there was something he had to see about. As manager of the Fielding Film Company, he has to attend to a lot of bothersome contracts."

"Believe me, he takes his duties seriously," Helen laughed. "Ruth, if you were in my place, would you order pastry?"

"Why ask my advice? I can tell by the hungry look in your eye that you're going to."

"I really should diet——"

"A nice helping of pastry will add at least two hundred calories to your diet," Ruth informed her, with a tantalizing grin. "But go ahead. If you get too fat you can join the circus."

"You're mean! I'm not on speaking terms with those things you call calories."

"And you have a college education! Let me tell you, if you want to reduce you'll have to find out how to go about it scientifically."

"Well, I won't start to-day," Helen said, turning to the waiter to put in the additional order.

Helen was far from being fat, but the thought of becoming too plump always worried her. Ruth was not forced to watch her diet in order to keep her weight down, for she was very active.

The girls left the dining room after tipping the waiter. Ruth returned to her room for work, and Helen, for lack of other occupation, went to the public park and listened to a brass band concert.

Tom and Chess met the girls later in the afternoon, and the four dined together in the evening. They discussed plans and Tom announced his intention of accompanying Chess to New York.

"We may as well leave on the Limited to-morrow," Tom suggested to Chess. "I must see a lawyer there and get everything in shape for the fall work of the Fielding Film Company."

Ruth nodded in approval.

"I'd go by all means, Tom. We want to make it a big year! Oh, no one knows what a relief it is for me not to have to worry about the financial end of it!" she added.

The following afternoon the two young men left for New York City, and Helen and Ruth insisted upon seeing them to the train. Tom had engaged Pullman reservations in advance, and so all confusion at the last minute was avoided.

Tom gave the bags to a porter, who put them in the proper section, and then the young men returned to the platform to stay with Ruth and Helen until the train pulled out of the station.

As they stood laughing and talking, more than one passer-by turned to look at them, for they were indeed an attractive group. A little girl, accompanied by her mother, turned to stare at Ruth.

"Look, mother!" she cried, loudly enough for the group to hear her. "See that girl? I saw her once in the movies."

"Your fame is spreading," Chess remarked.

"Do you wonder I'm not crazy to take the lead in another picture?" Ruth asked. "I don't like publicity."

"The train is about ready to start," Helen warned the young men. "When shall we expect you back, Tom?"

"Probably in three or four days," Tom returned. "Can't tell exactly until I see how things stand. If everything is in shape I'll come back when Chess does."

"Don't forget Mrs. Vanderwalker's charity ball," Ruth thought to remind him. "We're all invited."

"Sure thing! We'll be back before that comes off."

"Mrs. Vanderwalker wants me to put on a stunt as a sort of interdance number. I'll need your help."

"We won't fail you." Tom turned toward the train.

A sharp blow of the whistle warned the young men that the train was almost ready to start, and the colored porter, grinning cheerfully at Ruth and Helen, yelled, "All aboard!"

"Look out for the skyscrapers, Chess!" Helen called out. "Don't work too hard, Tom."

Chess climbed aboard, for the porter warned them that he must close the vestibule door, and with a parting smile in Ruth's direction, Tom followed.

"Well," Helen sighed regretfully, "I wouldn't have Chess know I said it for the world, but it seems to me this place is likely to be mighty lonesome the next few days. A vacation would be hard work if Tom and Chess didn't tag along."

"Right-o," Ruth agreed, unconsciously using one of Tom's expressions.

"Don't know how to kill time," Helen mourned. "Maybe I'll try Rip Van Winkle's trick and try to sleep the days away."

"Perhaps something exciting will happen. As far as I'm concerned, I shall dig into my scenario. If there are no interruptions I should have it finished by the time Chess and Tom get back."

"Then we can have one jolly lark until our vacations end," Helen declared, more cheerful at the prospect.

Ruth little dreamed of the events that were to take place before the young men returned. Her writing was destined to be interrupted in an unexpected way.

CHAPTER IX

AN INTERRUPTION

"This is an ideal place for me,
Says our Ruthie at the shore,
For whenever she cracks a joke,
The breakers simply roar!"

HELEN CAMERON held up the piece of paper upon which she had worked so faithfully, and, in a voice tense with pretended emotion, read the lines. She glanced in triumph at her friend who sat beside her on the rock.

Ruth could not help laughing at the silly jingle, although she put her notebook away rather regretfully. She knew it was useless to try to work when Helen was bent on fun.

The girl had kept her promise and had buckled down to the task of finishing her scenario. The absence of Tom and Chess left her more free hours. The young men never intentionally demanded her time, but their plans for good times were often too much of a temptation. Luckily there was a good endowed library at Cedar Grove

Bay, and Ruth had haunted the place, for she was determined that her manuscript should not contain one error of fact.

On the whole, her work progressed well, but sometimes Helen rather thoughtlessly interrupted her. This morning, after protesting that she would be "as still as a mouse," she had accompanied Ruth to the cliff. Ruth soon found out that it was really impossible for Helen to remain absolutely quiet for any length of time. Her little exclamations, funny observations and questions, were always attracting Ruth's attention and breaking a train of thought.

"Well, what do you think of my poetry?"

Ruth regarded Helen quizzically before she answered.

"You seem to have the earmarks of genius."

Helen was instantly suspicious.

"Earmarks? Is that a tactful way you have of telling me I need to wash?"

"Not at all," Ruth replied sweetly. "But you know there are times when a joke isn't a joke."

"For instance?"

"When it comes back from the editor with a rejection slip."

"In that case, it wouldn't be your joke, but mine."

"My scenario may be a joke," Ruth said seriously. "A masterpiece of junk!"

"Fat chance!"

"More chance than you think if I don't apply myself better than I have this morning——"

"Meaning I'm an awful nuisance?"

"Not at all," Ruth quickly returned, for she did not wish to offend Helen. "For some reason I seem on edge——"

"And I *am* bothering," Helen cried, jumping up from her seat. "You're just too polite and too sweet to say so. I'll go off and leave you now. Good luck, Ruthie dear. See you at luncheon."

After Helen had left her and returned to the hotel, it was some time before Ruth settled down to work again. The polishing of her scenario, the task of making details fit perfectly into the story, was the most trying kind of work, but Ruth felt that it would be these finishing touches that would distinguish the manuscript from the thousands of others entered in the great international contest.

Though Ruth had been busy, she had not forgotten Fred Orman. After her talk with the young man on the beach, she had kept her promise and had written a letter to the manager of the Dowall Motion Picture Company. In the letter she spoke highly of Orman, and recommended him for the position which he sought. She had not seen Orman since her talk with him, and accordingly had not found out whether or

not he had profited from her aid. The past few days had been such crowded ones that she had scarcely thought of him at all.

Ruth was thankful to find that her worries concerning Dean Hollister had been without foundation. The man had never troubled her, and, as far as the girl knew, he had left Cedar Grove Bay. She made up her mind that she had been mistaken in thinking she had seen him on the beach, and turned her attention to the more important matter—her scenario.

For a half hour Ruth wrote steadily. At length she glanced up from her paper to rest her eyes. As she did so, she was surprised and not a little irritated to observe that a man had taken up his station near by on a rock. He was stretched out full length and was apparently sunning himself.

The man seemed to be asleep, and yet, for some reason, Ruth wondered. She could not be certain, but she thought she detected a movement of the man's eyelids. He was directly facing her. "I suppose he has a right to come here if he wants to," she admitted grudgingly to herself. "I haven't a monopoly of the place; but common courtesy would have made him select a place farther away."

The thought of being a curiosity did not appeal to Ruth. The girl could not object to the presence of the man, but she did not care to be watched.

"Don't see why he would be interested in what I am doing," Ruth argued with herself.

She attempted to return to her work. She did not like to admit that the stranger could force her away from her favorite spot. It was silly of her to keep thinking about the man—and yet, in spite of her determination, her mind continued to dwell upon unpleasant thoughts.

Obviously, the man was watching her. Ruth discovered that when she glanced up quickly and saw that he had shifted his position. He was only pretending to sleep.

At last, determined to free herself of the distracting effect of this other person, Ruth gathered her things together and, without a glance in the direction of the man, walked quickly away. The day was far too pleasant to waste, so instead of returning to her hotel, Ruth found another rock, less inviting than the first one, but out of sight of the stranger.

With a sigh of relief, she settled herself comfortably in the new place. Feeling that she was again alone, she soon lost herself in her writing.

Page after page Ruth turned out, and then, for no reason at all, she began to feel uncomfortable. She glanced about her, but there was no one in sight. She sensed rather than saw the unfriendly eyes upon her. Ruth laughed nervously.

"I am on edge," she decided. "Helen must be

right. I'm working too hard. I declare, I'm as nervous as a cat!"

Ruth again turned to her notebook, but after writing a meaningless line, she glanced up. Upon impulse she scrambled to her feet and looked directly behind her.

There, scarcely twenty feet away, stood the man. He was leaning against a rock and was watching Ruth. The girl felt a chill pass over her body, for she could not mistake the identity of this stranger. In that moment of surprise, it seemed to Ruth that his body resembled that of a huge ape.

"Dean Hollister!" The words flashed through her mind!

Ruth did not allow her face to express her true feelings as she gazed with alarm upon the man that she felt certain was Dean Hollister. She had schooled herself to meet unpleasant situations calmly, for she had discovered that by so doing she gained an advantage.

The man came slowly toward her. Ruth was disgusted at the thought of meeting him, and in her heart there was a little fear.

"I have no reason to be afraid," she reasoned with herself. "He must have a special purpose in wishing to see me."

From curiosity, if for no other reason, Ruth would have stood her ground. She knew that

Hollister could not have recognized her the day of his fight with Orman.

"You are Miss Fielding?"

The man addressed Ruth in an almost insolent tone. He regarded her for a moment, and then with an exaggerated movement, removed his hat and bowed.

"I am Miss Fielding," she replied shortly.

"I have heard a great deal about you—and of your remarkable success in scenario writing."

"Indeed!"

"I am deeply interested in writing myself—and especially in your work."

The fact was obvious, Ruth thought. Judging from the way he had watched her for the past half hour, he was indeed interested in something. Aloud she said:

"I beg your pardon, but I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance. And I'm sure I can't see what my work has to do with you."

Ruth expected her pointed speech to disconcert the man, but she was mistaken.

"I am Dean Hollister. Undoubtedly you have heard of my work, as we're in the same game."

In the same game, indeed!

"I can't say that I have."

"Miss Fielding, I have watched your work for the last year. I feel sure that you have a future before you."

Ruth had to bite her lip to keep from laughing. The man was actually trying to flatter her, and he was not even tactful. She maintained a cold silence, but even that failed to discourage Hollister.

"You are planning another big picture, I understand."

"Really, Mr. Hollister, I don't know where you get your information. Plans for the Fielding Film Company have not been made."

Ruth knew perfectly well that Hollister was trying to pump her, and purposely she gave out no information. Why the man was so interested in her company she could not imagine. She wanted to find out, and for that reason permitted the one-sided conversation to go on.

"Mr. Cameron, your financial manager, is in New York at the present time, attending to the company's business, is he not?"

"It seems to me you know a great deal about my personal affairs," Ruth cut in sharply. "What if Mr. Cameron has gone to New York? Possibly he has personal business there!"

"Quite possible, of course," Hollister retorted, with a wise smile. "And yet, a man doesn't tear himself away from a delightful young lady unless business is most pressing."

"Mr. Hollister, you are positively insulting!"

"Not at all. Aren't you writing another scenario?"

"Perhaps I am, and perhaps I'm not!"

Ruth recalled that she had left the torn pages of her scenario on the rocks, and that when she returned to the same spot on the following day she had noticed that the pages were gone. She had taken it for granted that the wind had blown them away. Now it occurred to her that possibly Hollister had found them. Otherwise, how could he know that she was writing a scenario? She determined to make certain.

"By the way," she began, watching his face closely, "I left some old pages of my notebook on the rocks a few days ago. Perhaps you found them."

The shot was a wild one, but it hit the mark. Hollister's smile faded from his face and for one brief instant a look of hate shone in his eyes. Then he recovered and flashed the smile that Helen would have described as "oily." Ruth observed the flush on his face, and was reasonably certain that he had taken the notes.

"I regret that I have found nothing, Miss Fielding."

Ruth looked at him sharply, but decided to say no more, for without definite evidence she dared not accuse him. Having found out, however,

what she wanted to know, Ruth determined to end the disagreeable interview.

"And now, Mr. Hollister, I wish you would leave me to my work," she suggested quietly.

"Your work? Then you are writing another scenario!"

There was something in Hollister's voice that told Ruth he was not to be trifled with. She was not really afraid now that she had talked with him, but she did not care to argue. She stared coldly at the man, and gathered up her things.

"Mr. Hollister, again I ask you. Will you leave?"

"Not until you've told me something of your work." Hollister leered daringly. "Come on, Miss Fielding, and be sociable!"

"If you won't go, then I shall!"

Ruth turned and walked rapidly away.

"Not so fast there, girlie. Don't think I'm going to let you run off that way!"

Ruth was frightened now. Hollister was a dangerous character, and the knowledge that Ruth's two close friends, Tom and Chess, were away made him bolder, more sure of his ground.

"If he keeps on following me I can run for it," Ruth reasoned, "but I hate to resort to that."

She glanced anxiously about in search of aid. As luck would have it, she saw another person not

far away. At first Ruth did not recognize the young man. Then in delight she saw who it was. Putting her hands to her mouth to intensify the sound, she shouted:

"Fred Orman! Fred Orman!"

Hollister wheeled quickly and looked in the direction that Ruth was facing. He, too, saw the young man, and the expression on his own face was not pleasant.

Orman heard Ruth, and shouted back. He came running toward the girl. Ruth turned and faced Hollister.

As she eyed him, he stooped down, picked up something from the rock upon which Ruth had been sitting and put it in his pocket. Ruth could not see what it was that Hollister had found, but she felt certain it belonged to her.

With a parting leer in her direction, Dean Hollister turned and walked rapidly away. Ruth, speechless with indignation, watched him until he disappeared among the rocks farther along the shore. She was still looking after him when Fred Orman reached her.

CHAPTER X

ORMAN OFFERS AID

"THE coward!" Ruth cried, as she saw Dean Hollister disappear.

In spite of his great strength, Hollister apparently was afraid of Fred Orman. Ruth shrugged her shoulders contemptuously and turned to face the young movie actor who had come in response to her call for help.

"Miss Fielding, I thought you called me. Is anything the matter?"

Orman, slightly out of breath, had arrived too late to see Dean Hollister take to his heels.

"I did call, but I no longer need help. Dean Hollister was bothering me."

"Dean Hollister! That rascal again? Where did he go?" Orman showed immediate concern.

Ruth indicated the direction Hollister had taken, but spoke quickly, as she saw that Orman was preparing to follow.

"I'll find that man yet!" Orman said between gritted teeth.

"He has the head start. I'm sure you can't

catch him this time. He saw you coming and ran."

Ruth did not wish to be the cause of a second encounter between Orman and Hollister, especially when she knew that the smaller man was no match for the larger. She admired the courage of the young actor.

"When it comes to physical force, we are no match for Hollister," she said quietly; "but I believe we can outwit him."

"Hollister isn't clever. His schemes are usually old, and he depends upon luck and theft to get along."

"Then it should be easy to beat him in his game. The trouble is, I'm not sure that I know what his scheme is."

"Perhaps he's troubling you because you helped me."

"I doubt it. I believe he was surprised to-day when he found out that I knew you. He did not see my face the day of the fight."

"What other purpose could he have?"

"He seemed very much interested in my scenario—I am writing one to submit in a contest." Ruth did not hesitate to take the young actor into her confidence.

"That's his line," Orman informed her. "He can tell a good scenario when he sees it and he may have designs on some of your ideas."

"You actually believe that——"

"Yes, that if Hollister could steal an idea, he would."

"But what would he gain? Stealing an idea isn't always profitable."

"Hollister knows how to dispose of it once he gets his hands on valuable material."

"I'll take care that he doesn't get anything of mine," Ruth declared. "I'm going back to the hotel now. I can't write any more to-day."

"I'll walk back with you, if you care to have me. Hollister might stop you again."

"I wish you would," and Ruth thanked the young man. "I'm convinced Hollister is a coward. Just the same, I'm not looking forward to another meeting."

Ruth and Fred Orman walked slowly along the beach to the hotel. In the excitement of the moment, Ruth neglected to examine her notebook and the other possessions that she had gathered together when Hollister interrupted her. For the time being, she forgot that Hollister had picked up something from the rock.

"Tom and Chess have gone to New York," Ruth said presently. "I'm sure Hollister wouldn't dare bother me if he didn't know they were gone."

"If I can help you at all, consider me at your service," Orman offered.

"I'd like to get an inkling of Hollister's intentions."

"I'll be glad to hang around this week and sort of keep my eye on him. I want to see Hollister on my own account, too, you know."

Ruth did know, and she hoped that the meeting would be delayed until after Tom and Chess returned.

"Have you heard from the Dowall Company?" she asked, as they paused in front of the hotel.

"I had a letter from the manager yesterday." Orman's face lighted. "I think there will be an opening for me within a few weeks. And if I land the job, it will be thanks to you."

Ruth extended her hand and smiled warmly. Then she left the young movie actor and went into the hotel.

She walked directly to the desk and requested her room key. As she waited, the loud comments of a group of women standing close by attracted her attention. The women had their backs to her, but she could not avoid hearing the conversation. She heard her name mentioned.

"If you ask me, Miss Fielding won't enter the international scenario contest," one of the women announced firmly.

"Such a contest attracts too many outstanding writers. An arrived author, such as Miss Field-

ing, can't afford to risk her reputation by chancing failure."

Inwardly Ruth raged. She wanted to confront the strangers and tell them that she was not a cheap sport. Her thoughts were interrupted by the clerk, who explained that Helen had taken the key from the desk. When Ruth turned around again, the women were walking away.

She went directly to her room, and found Helen curled up near the window reading a magazine.

"What's the matter, Ruth? You look peeved."

"I am!" Ruth quickly recounted the conversation. "It makes me more than ever determined to enter that contest—and win!"

"That's the fight!" Helen approved. "Don't pay any attention to the old cats! How did you get along with the scenario to-day?"

"Not very well." Ruth plunged into the story of her meeting with Dean Hollister.

"Some people have all the luck," Helen complained when the story was finished.

"Luck?"

"Yes, I call excitement luck. Here I am, dying to see Hollister—and I never do. Wish something thrilling would happen to me."

"Well, I don't wish anything like that, and I'm desperately afraid there's plenty of it ahead."

Ruth walked to the window and looked out thoughtfully. Already she was more disturbed

than she cared to have Helen know. She was destined to be even more alarmed when she examined the papers that she had taken with her to the cliff.

"I shouldn't worry," Helen comforted. "Hollister is probably just one of those smarties getting fresh."

"Possibly," and Ruth let it go at that.

Soon after Ruth spoke there came a knock on the door. Both girls looked at each other in surprise. Ruth went to the door and opened it. A uniformed boy handed her a yellow envelope.

"A telegram for me," Ruth announced as she brought it back and showed it to Helen. "I hope nothing has gone wrong at the Red Mill."

Ruth ripped open the envelope and glanced over the contents. Her face relaxed.

"It's all right. Tom sent it."

"Tom? And Chess didn't send me one!"

"He did send you a message," Ruth laughed. "You haven't given me a chance to read it yet."

"Let me see it!" Helen leaned eagerly over Ruth's shoulder. The telegram read:

"Everything O.K. Back Thursday. Chess sends Helen greetings. Watch for package."

"I'm glad they're coming back Thursday," Ruth admitted. "I know it's silly, but I feel safer when I know Tom is within call."

"Uh-huh," Helen agreed, her eyes still on the telegram.

"What do you suppose Tom meant by saying to watch for a package, Helen? Flowers?"

Helen grinning knowingly, shook her head.

"Not flowers, Ruth! Something nicer than that!"

"Helen Cameron, what do you know about it? Are you in the scheme too?"

"Wait and see," Helen laughed with provoking indifference.

"Helen, I'll die of curiosity!"

"What a sensational finish! Now stop teasing me, because I promised Tom and Chess I wouldn't give the secret away."

"Chess? He's in the plot too?"

"You'll have to let the postman solve the mystery," Helen declared firmly, delighted that she had stirred up her chum's interest.

CHAPTER XI

THE MISSING PAGES

"HELEN, isn't the telephone ringing?"

Ruth stirred sleepily in bed and tried to arouse her chum.

"Let 'er ring," Helen mumbled, and turned over, pulling the covers over her face.

"Lazy thing! There it goes again!" Ruth bounded from the bed and hurried to the telephone. When she returned a few minutes later Helen's curiosity was aroused, and she sat up, sleepily rubbing her eyes.

"Pity they can't call later in the day!"

"It's after nine o'clock. Time both of us were up. I don't know when I've been so lazy."

"Who was it?"

"Mrs. Vanderwalker—rather her secretary. The charity ball committee meets this afternoon, and I'm supposed to attend."

"Well, what makes you look so glum about it? You'll meet some very influential ladies."

"But it all takes time. The meeting will occupy

most of the afternoon. My scenario is knocked in the head for another day."

"Too bad," Helen agreed, and slumped down under the covers.

"Get up!" Ruth ordered, looking about for a suitable object to hurl at her chum. "We're going down to breakfast before it's luncheon time!"

Regretfully, Helen extracted herself from the comfortable bed.

"You're a regular slave driver," she complained. "Some day you'll want to sleep late too, and when you do—then I'll have my revenge!"

The girls did not finish breakfast until after ten o'clock. By the time Ruth collected her writing materials it was too late to accomplish any real work.

In the afternoon she kept her promise and attended the committee meeting at Mrs. Vanderwalker's home. As the girl anticipated, the meeting was a long one. Mrs. Vanderwalker was a charming hostess, and Ruth would have enjoyed the afternoon had she not wished to use the time for writing. Ruth offered a number of suggestions, and her ideas met with the hearty support and approval of all the committee members.

Following the meeting, Mrs. Vanderwalker took Ruth back to the hotel in her automobile. It was five o'clock when Ruth reached her room. The scenario must wait another day.

"Mail for you!" Helen greeted her.

"Helen, I believe you just live for letters alone." Ruth smiled as she took the mail.

A hurried glance told her that the letters were from two of the stars of the Fielding Film Company who were taking vacations in the South.

"Every one seems ready for work again," Ruth reported after she had finished the letters. "As soon as I get the scenario off my hands, I must make plans for a big year."

"You're one of the few persons that can truly thank your lucky stars," Helen chuckled. "The more they twinkle, the more money the producers make."

"Right you are. But you forget that a producer must risk considerable money to bring out a new star. I want to give the public some new stars this year, but I can't do it unless I have a surplus fund. I have a crying need for that fifty thousand dollar prize offered in the scenario contest."

"The contest worries you, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does, Helen. It isn't the money exactly, although goodness knows I can use it. My reputation as a writer hangs in the balance."

"Well, you'll win, old dear. We're all banking on you!"

"Thanks, Helen," Ruth changed the subject. "That was all the mail that came, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, there was a box."

"From New York? Helen Cameron, you imp! Give it to me this instant!"

"There it is—over on the table."

"What do you suppose it is?" Ruth examined the box critically and began to work with the wrapping. It was several minutes before the outside cover was removed. When at last she viewed the contents, she gazed first in surprise and then in delight.

"Like it?" Helen asked, her own eyes lighting up.

"Do I?" Ruth cried, giving her chum a generous squeeze. "It's just what I need. My old typewriter is nearly shot, and I've always wanted a portable."

"It was Tom's idea."

"But, Helen, I can't take it—the expense——"

"Now, Ruthie, don't be foolish. It isn't strictly Tom's gift. Chess and I chipped in too, and you can't refuse it without making all of us peeved. We know perfectly well that you have enough money to buy yourself a new typewriter, but the fact remains that you won't spend much money on yourself."

"And you're in it too? Helen, you *are* a dear!"

"The worst of it is, your scenario is almost finished. You won't have much use for it now."

"Yes, I shall. I'll be doing other writing, and

I hate to write in longhand. Now I can go to the cliff and have my machine with me."

"If I were in your place, I wouldn't go alone," Helen advised, with an anxious frown. "Hollister may bother you again."

"You're probably right. But it goes against my grain to have a check on my freedom."

Helen glanced at her watch.

"Better dress for dinner, Ruth. It's late."

"All right," Ruth agreed. "In a minute. I want to glance over my notes first."

Ruth made a practice of looking back over the work of the previous day, for often the girl found that after she allowed the writing to "get cold" she could more easily detect flaws and correct them. Save for a hasty glance over her notes, she had not touched them since the afternoon that Hollister had interrupted her writing.

Ruth went to the desk where she always kept her manuscript. Opening one of the drawers she took out the papers and was irritated to find the pages slightly out of order. She began to arrange them. Several sheets were missing, and again she went over the papers, thinking that she had been careless in sorting. She did not find the pages, and became alarmed.

Again Ruth searched, examining every drawer in the desk in the hope that the papers had been misplaced. She went through the waste paper

basket and looked beind the desk. At last she turned to Helen.

"You haven't seen any papers around, have you?"

"Papers? Pages of your manuscript?"

Ruth nodded, her face showing the anxiety she felt.

"No, Ruth, I haven't. You're always so careful with everything. But if I had noticed them out of place, I'd have picked them up."

"It's just as I thought!"

"What do you mean?"

"My storm scene is gone!"

"Ruth! Not really?"

"Yes, some one has taken the pages—or I've lost them, or something!"

"The best part of your scenario!"

"The very heart of it. Helen! It takes the courage right out of me. I worked so fearfully hard on that part, too!"

"Cheer up, Ruth. We'll find the pages."

"I doubt it."

"But even if you don't find them, you can rewrite the scene, can't you?"

"Yes," Ruth admitted, a trifle more cheerfully. "Of course it means more delay and work, but I guess I can do it."

"Then why worry, Ruth?"

"Helen, suppose some one should find the

scene—some one that understands the technical language of a scenario. And just suppose that that person should decide to use the idea as his own!"

"You don't think any one could be that mean?"

"There are some mighty queer people in the world."

"But it's stealing!"

"Helen," Ruth announced, quietly, "I've been pretty stupid. I can't see how the fact slipped my mind! Now I recall that when I was on the cliff I saw a certain man pick up something from the rock where I had been sitting. At the time I wondered what it was and thought that it probably belonged to me. Then Fred Orman came up, and in talking with him I entirely forgot the incident."

"You think you dropped the scene on the rock? And that the man was——"

Ruth silenced her before she spoke the name.

"I'm not making any accusations, but I'm going right back to the cliff this very minute to see if by any chance the pages are still there."

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER LOSS

BEFORE the two girls left the hotel for the cliff, to search for the missing pages of Ruth's manuscript, the young writer once more went through her desk and her possessions, to make certain that the papers were really gone. The hunt did not reveal the missing storm scene and the directions for filming it—instead it disclosed another loss.

"Two of the other scenes are gone, too," Ruth fairly wailed as she made the discovery. "Helen, what shall I do? It means days and days of work if I can't find the pages."

Ruth sank into a chair, and, in utter discouragement, dropped her head upon her arms. Helen, too, had been searching the room for the papers. Now she came to her friend and slipped her arm around her.

"Come on, Ruth. I'll go with you to the cliff. Don't be blue. We'll find those pages if we have to comb Cedar Grove Bay."

"I'm so careless——"

"You aren't careless," Helen declared. "You know very well you didn't misplace those scenes. Just the same, we'll make sure."

The two girls put on their hats and walked rapidly from the hotel to the cliff where Ruth so often worked. They looked about them carefully, and Ruth even got down on her hands and knees and peered into the deep cracks of other rocks near by. The search revealed nothing.

"Then I moved to another rock," Ruth said, after the girls had decided that it was useless to hunt longer where they were. "Let's try there."

Ruth was discouraged. She felt that they were wasting time, for she was almost certain that Hollister was responsible for her loss. In her heart, the girl was sick. Of all persons in the world, Hollister was the last one that she would have wanted to see the precious pages. Helen, she knew, had her own ideas about the loss.

"Well, they're gone," Ruth faltered. They had searched the second rock and the surrounding places where the wind might have blown a paper.

"I'm afraid so," Helen admitted, with a sigh. "Ruth, you're so conservative you won't accuse people, but I will! If you dropped those pages on this rock and Hollister was here, I'll bet he took them."

Ruth did not silence her chum this time.

"I distinctly saw him pick up something. Of course I can't tell what it was."

"We'll report him to the police," Helen announced savagely. "He can't get by with anything as raw as that!"

"You can't arrest any one without evidence."

"We'll get some evidence, then. We've played at this detective business before."

"I'm afraid it isn't as easy as it sounds. We haven't much to go on this time."

"We'll wait until Tom and Chess get back, then. They'll take this Hollister in hand."

"By that time, I'm afraid it will be too late. If Hollister is really guilty, he'll probably skip out of Cedar Grove Bay without loss of time."

"He's the meanest man I ever heard of!" Helen declared bitterly. She took the loss as seriously as did her chum.

"Helen, I ought to be ashamed to get discouraged so easily. But to think of doing all that work over again! I have a notion to let the whole thing slide. I doubt if I can win the prize, anyway."

"Now look here," Helen snapped. "It isn't a bit like you to lose heart so easily. You're just dead tired from pounding away at the thing day after day."

"Of course I intend to go on with the scenario," and Ruth, trying to rally her forces, smiled faintly.

"I won't be a quitter now that I've started. I was just telling you how I feel about it."

"You haven't much time left. What is the dead line?"

"I have exactly two more weeks before the manuscript must be in the New York office."

"But you can finish it in that time!"

"I suppose so. The worst of it is, if that fellow is the rascal Orman says he is, he'll certainly try to use the plot elsewhere—and especially the big storm scene. And if he gets ahead of me, every one will say I stole my ideas from him."

"Ruth, they couldn't say that!"

"For all I know, this man may enter a manuscript in the very same international contest. The scenario will likely be judged by persons that have never heard of either of us."

"But, Ruth, what is there about a storm scene that can be so original? A storm is a storm, and——"

"But this is so unusual, Helen! The rascal has the child and is running away. He loses his hat in the wind. He drops the child to go after the hat. The hat rolls along the road close to the old church—the church where the child's grandfather had preached and where he was shot by the rascal. At that moment the sky darkens, the wind increases, the church steeple sways, the rascal starts to run—and the steeple comes down,

burying him in the wreckage. The same wind carries the child along the road to the milk house where the girl heroine is hiding. Can't you see how Hollister might make use of all this? And it's the very turning point of my scenario!"

Helen listened attentively to Ruth, but now she silenced her with a gesture.

"S-h, not so loud! Some one is coming. It may be Hollister."

Both girls drew back against the rock and waited for the appearance of the person they could hear coming nearer and nearer.

The man came into view. He was not Dean Hollister. Before he observed the two girls, Ruth cried out in relief.

"Mr. Orman!"

The young movie actor stopped short, and then, recognizing Helen and Ruth, removed his cap and smiled.

"You gave us a real scare," Helen laughed. "We thought you were Hollister."

"Hollister?" Orman's face became stern. "Has that fellow troubled you again?"

Before Ruth could answer, Helen, who loved to tell exciting news, plunged into the story of the lost pages of the scenario. She punctuated the tale with personal comments concerning the questionable character of Hollister. Orman nodded agreement when she finished.

"Sounds like one of Dean Hollister's tricks. It would be like him to take the papers."

"What a cowardly trick!" Ruth cried. "I've tried to give him the benefit of the doubt, for I can't be certain he took the pages."

"It's his style," Orman insisted firmly. "He's petty and grasping. He'd steal from a woman as quickly as from a man."

"And he knows you're a successful scenario writer," Helen put in. "Your ideas mean money to Hollister."

"There's one fact I haven't told you," Ruth said quietly.

"What is that?" Helen asked quickly.

"You know, I lost three scenes—two minor ones and the storm scene."

"Yes," Helen agreed eagerly.

"Well, I had the storm scene with me here on the rocks. I was rereading it. I am certain that I dropped those pages and equally sure that Hollister took them. What I did not tell you is this. The other two scenes were left in my desk at the hotel."

"You think some one entered your room?" Orman demanded.

"It looks like it."

"Hollister thinks we're just two helpless girls!" Helen raved. "He thinks he can get by with anything!"

"I can't make it out," Ruth continued. "Granted that Hollister picked up the storm scene on the rocks and then entered my room and took two of the other scenes—why didn't he take the complete manuscript?"

"You've got me there," Orman admitted. "If I were you, I'd lock my papers up."

"Our room was locked."

"It would be easy to get in with a duplicate key."

Ruth looked earnestly at Helen and Fred Orman. The gleam in her eyes told them that she was thoroughly aroused.

"Unless I'm mistaken, we're not through with Dean Hollister!" she stated.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE BAY

"To-day is Thursday, Ruth. What train do you think Tom and Chess will come in on?"

Helen Cameron and her chum were returning to their hotel after an early morning walk. The fresh breeze had given their cheeks high color, and the two girls were bubbling over with good spirits. Ruth glanced at her watch.

"There's a train due from New York in about fifteen minutes," she replied. "It's possible they may be on that one."

"What say we meet them, Ruthie? We haven't anything else to do."

"Speak for yourself!" Ruth thought of the manuscript that she was trying to reconstruct. "However, I'd just as soon go along. I want to see Tom before he goes to his hotel, as I have a lot to tell him."

The girls did not stop at the hotel, but continued on their way down the street until they came to the railway station, which was not a great distance away. While Cedar Grove Bay was a

fashionable summer resort, it was not a large city, and the railway station boasted no gateman. The girls were permitted to go directly to the tracks.

"Tom and Chess will be flattered to death to find us here," Helen giggled.

"They may have taken another train. Wasn't that the whistle?"

A moment later the heavy train pulled slowly into the station. The two girls eagerly watched the passengers get off.

"I don't believe they came," Helen said, in disappointment.

"Yes, they did!" Ruth exclaimed. "They're getting off the last car. The porter is helping them with their bags."

Tom and Chess were attending to their luggage. An instant later they turned, saw the girls, and hurried to meet them. Enthusiastic greetings were exchanged.

"Miss me much?" Chess demanded of Helen, as he insisted on kissing his fiancée.

"Miss you?" Helen's eyebrows went up in mock surprise. "Why, I came down to meet Tom. Have you really been away?"

"You should be ashamed of yourself." Chess grinned as he fished in an outside pocket. "I brought you something."

"Candy!" Helen fastened upon it with a cry

of delight. "Oh, Chess, I didn't mean what I said!"

Tom produced a smilar box for Ruth, and she, too, was highly pleased with the gift.

"You really shouldn't have done it, Tom. After the portable typewriter—" she began, after receiving his kiss.

"That was a joint gift. And a box of candy isn't much."

"Helen is dieting," Ruth informed the young men as they all walked toward a taxicab. "I really think I should eat both boxes."

"I stopped dieting ten minutes ago," Helen cut in.

The young men's luggage was piled into the cab, and the four took their seats.

"How did business go?" Ruth asked, after Tom had given the address of the hotel to the driver.

"Fine! Saw our lawyer, and there are no flaws in our contracts."

"And our finances?"

"The Fielding Film Company is in tip-top shape." Tom hesitated before continuing. "The worst of it is, the money that's due you from your last picture is slow coming in. Unless I get my hands on some ready cash, I'm afraid you can't launch out into a greater field before six months or so."

"I was afraid of it, Tom. And I do want to

try something big in the way of pictures. I could borrow the money I suppose, but I don't want to do that."

"There are plenty of fellows that would be glad to loan you the money now that the Fielding Company is standing on its own legs," Chess stated.

"I know that," Ruth replied. "But the friends that are worth having are those that back an enterprise when success is doubtful."

Ruth flashed a meaningful glance at Tom, and the young man, who knew very well that he was being complimented, flushed.

"We don't intend to borrow unless we are forced to," Ruth went on. "I'll try harder than ever to win the scenario prize. That money will help."

Reminded of her loss, Ruth began the story of the theft, and Helen supplied missing details. The young men listened quietly until the girls ended the tale.

"Orman was right when he said Hollister should be in jail!" Tom cried with anger.

"Tom and I will take a hand in this game," Chess offered. "Just turn Hollister over to us."

"I'll be mighty glad of the chance. As it happens, I haven't seen him since the day I lost the papers."

"You think he skipped?" Tom questioned.

"I don't know. But I have a feeling he's still here."

"Trust him to hang around if he thinks there's anything more to be gained," Tom voiced his opinion.

"Ruth's worn herself ragged trying to rewrite those scenes," Helen put in. "She won't tell you how hard she's worked—but I will. Honestly, she's barely taken time to breathe."

"And with all the work, I'm no farther along than I was when Tom and Chess left."

Presently the taxicab stopped in front of the hotel where Helen and Ruth were staying. The young men escorted the girls to the door, and then turned to leave.

"We'll drive over to our hotel and drop off the bags," Tom explained. "Then as soon as we clean up a bit, we'll come back here."

"And have a council of war," Chess added. "We'll hash this question over and map out a plan to beat Hollister at his own game."

The young men returned to the waiting cab, and Ruth and Helen went to their room.

"Tom has never once failed me when I have needed him," Ruth remarked, as the girls rode up in the elevator. "I feel easier in my mind already."

A half hour later the girls met Tom and Chess

in the drawing room of the big hotel. They found a quiet corner out of earshot of others and began to discuss Ruth's loss in low tones.

"I think Ruth is right," Tom declared, after the conversation had continued for several minutes. "We can't do a thing until we actually know that Hollister is the guilty party."

"Nothing much we can do until he makes another move," Chess admitted. "And until we get some real evidence to work on, why not enjoy our vacation? What do you say to an outing on the bay?"

"No motor boat for me!" Helen sang out quickly.

"I'm not crazy over one myself," Chess grinned. "We can rent a sailboat."

"And to make sure that nothing will go wrong we can engage a seasoned tar to go with us," Tom suggested, for the plan appealed to him. "I know a skipper we probably can get—Tobias Henn. What he doesn't know about boats isn't worth mentioning."

"Why not wait until to-morrow afternoon?" Ruth proposed. "I shouldn't spare the time even then, but I can't resist the temptation."

The four agreed upon the plan, and eagerly awaited the following day. Tom and Chess made a preliminary trip to the docks, located Tobias, and rented his sailboat. He promised to

accompany them on the excursion, and assured them that there was no danger.

"I been sailin' for nigh on thirty years now, an' I ain't had one serious accident," he bragged. "Sometimes the wind goes down and leaves you out in the middle, but I always tow a rowboat along, and if worst comes to worst I kin git back."

The next afternoon Tom and Chess called for the girls, and the four made their way to the water front, where they were to meet Tobias. Ruth and Helen were dressed in neat sport suits, and the former carried a bright slicker.

"It doesn't look a bit like rain," she admitted, glancing at the sky. "But I've learned since I came here that you never can tell how a day will end by the way it starts. Better safe than sorry —you may wish you had slickers, too, before we get back."

The young folks had decided to sail to Rossmore Island, which was ten miles away from Cedar Grove Bay. Ruth and Helen had brought along a light lunch, and the four planned to have a picnic on the island before returning. Tom informed the old skipper where the party wished to go, and then turned to help Ruth and Helen into the boat.

As the sailboat rose over a swell and plunged downward, the whole length of the bay was re-

vealed as a stretch of tossing blue, flecked with whitecaps. The pier was left to the rear. The air was hazy, and a few big clouds hung low, but the breeze was refreshing. Ruth took a deep breath.

"Like it?" Tom demanded.

"I love it! I wish I knew more about boats. What kind is this one, Tom?"

"A mainsail and jib skiff. I like them better than catboats myself."

The boat was now drawing near the head of the bay, and Tobias Henn pointed out various landmarks. They passed a lighthouse that marked the entrance of the harbor. Ruth displayed a practical interest in her surroundings, asking the depth of water and the location of rocks, shallows and sandbars.

"These waters is pretty safe," Tobias informed them. "Once in a while a boat smashes agin Star Rock, though."

"Where is that located?" Ruth asked.

"Off shore from Rossmore Island. The rock's covered at high tide."

As they sailed along Chess and Tom began to talk about Dean Hollister and his actions. At the mention of Hollister's name Tobias looked interested.

"I guess I know that sport," remarked the old tar grimly.

"You do!" cried Tom. "What can you tell us of him?"

"Not much good—if you want to know it," was the answer.

"We know he's no good," put in Chess. "But what do you know?"

"Hollister came an' hired the boat one day—took out three giddy girls fer a sail. When we got back he claimed we didn't go as far as promised, an' he didn't want to pay. We had quite an argyment an' I said I'd call in the police. Then he paid up in a hurry—and got out in a hurry, too."

"Just like the rascal," answered Tom. Later on he told Ruth and his twin sister, who, during the old man's recital, had been talking of something else, what Tobias had related.

The time passed swiftly, and Ruth knew that the sailboat must be near Rossmore Island. She glanced toward the horizon and was surprised to see that the haze was steadily growing darker. She turned questioning eyes upon Tobias and saw him wet a finger and hold it to the dying wind.

"There's going to be a squall," he announced.

Ruth and Helen looked at each other. Other boats on the water were reefing. The sail of their own vessel was shivering in the wind.

"There's some oilskins in that box there," Tobias told them. "Might git into 'em."

Ruth put on the slicker she had brought with her, and the others managed to wriggle into the sticky garments that Tobias offered.

"We've got to run fer it," Tobias continued. He seemed not at all alarmed by the approaching storm. "We maybe kin reach the island ahead of the blow."

Ruth glanced at the clouds which were growing blacker. She caught the sound of thunder in the wake of a flash of lightning. The storm was almost upon them. She wondered if Tobias could get them safely to shore.

Tom and Chess were helping Tobias with the sails and were obeying his commands. Ruth offered to help, but the skipper waved her back into a seat.

With a sudden roar, the wind struck them. The boat was laid over sharply, and the sail dipped almost into the water.

"She's on us!" Tobias said grimly, and then devoted himself to the task of piloting the boat safely into the protecting cove of the island.

CHAPTER XIV

A RUN FOR SAFETY

TOBIAS HENN stood immovable at the wheel, peering ahead at the stretch of land that loomed up. He nodded with satisfaction.

"We got here just in time," he chuckled, as they drew to shore. "Here, you young fellows, help me make her fast. She's goin' to blow some hard, if I ain't mistaken." Ruth wondered what Tobias considered a hard blow, for already the breeze was a stiff one.

With Helen, she climbed hurriedly out of the boat as soon as the skipper had effected a landing. Tom and Chess helped him fasten the craft securely. The sky was very dark now, and Ruth and Helen looked about them for possible shelter.

"The rain will catch us if we don't hurry," Ruth cried. "Look! There's an old shack over there. Let's run for it!"

As Ruth spoke, the first large drop of rain splashed down. Tom thoughtfully fished the picnic basket out of the bottom of the boat, and

turned to follow Ruth and Helen, who were heading for the shack. Chess and Tobias brought up the rear.

Ruth knocked upon the door of the cabin, but there was no reply. Instead, with an increased roar of wind, a deluge of rain descended upon the party. Without hesitation, Tom, who had caught up with the girls, thrust open the door. The place was deserted.

"What a dirty place!" Helen exclaimed, shaking the water from her oilskin and looking about her.

"Be thankful you're here and not out on the bay," Ruth chided, but with a twinkle in her eyes. "Not the nicest spot in the world for a picnic, but I'm hungry enough to eat a fried brick!"

Helen and Ruth spread clean papers over the kitchen table, and when they had unpacked the basket, the luncheon was an inviting one. Tom and Chess sat down at the table and at Ruth's request Tobias joined the picnic party. Tom reached out, helped himself to a sandwich, and bit into it.

"Talk about your sandwiches—" he began, but broke off abruptly as the door of the cabin was unexpectedly thrust open.

Startled, Tom and the others looked up in surprise. Two burly, rough-appearing tramps stood in the doorway. The men regarded the

little party with insolent grins. Their eyes fastened upon the food that was spread out upon the table.

"Does this cabin belong to you?" Ruth questioned politely.

The two tramps gazed at each other significantly.

"No, it don't," one of them leered. "But we're going to stay here, just the same!"

Ruth and her friends had no thought of refusing shelter to the two men, but their attitude was very unpleasant, and their appearance aroused suspicion.

Deliberately one of the tramps, a fellow who looked like a heavyweight prize-fighter, walked across the floor and took a sandwich from the plate on the table.

Had the man requested food, none of the party would have refused him, but as it was, his action was inexcusable. Ruth's eyes flashed. Tom pushed back his chair and stood up, regarding the two tramps with resentment.

"If you stay here, you'll act like gentlemen!"

The two tramps burst into loud, raucous laughter.

"Gentlemen! Ha-ha! Little boy, run home and tell your mama that we'll do just what we please. Now you get out of this place, pronto!"

By this time Chess also was on his feet. He

stepped to Tom's side. When Tom spoke his voice was low, but there was a click to his words that warned the two tramps that he was no mere boy to be trifled with.

"We offered you shelter and you abused our hospitality. Leave this cabin or we'll put you out!"

Tom's words were no idle boast. He was aroused, and as he spoke he took a step toward the two men. Chess followed him, his own fists doubled up ready for action.

The two tramps looked first at the two young men and at Tobias, and then at each other. Burly as they were, they were cowards, and they saw that their bluff would not work. They must either fight or leave, and they would not fight. Without a word, they shuffled to the door, flashing glances of hatred at the two young men. The door slammed behind them.

"And this was supposed to be a pleasant little picnic party!" Helen groaned. "I declare, we've already had enough excitement to last the summer!"

"The nerve of those two tramps!" Ruth commented. "I'd have thought I wouldn't turn any one out in the rain, but they certainly deserved drastic treatment."

Tom was looking out of the window, watching the retreating figures of the two men.

"It's almost stopped raining," he observed. "I believe the storm is over."

"Then we'd better finish our lunch and get back home," Ruth advised.

After the lunch things were cleared away, the party returned to the sailboat. The sky was rapidly brightening, and the storm seemed to have entirely passed over. The sheltering cove was left far behind, and the young folks again enjoyed the pleasant sensation of gliding over the surface of the water.

They had gone perhaps five miles, when Ruth noticed that the skipper was watching the sky with anxiety.

"Storm's coming back," he announced in reply to Ruth's questioning look. "She's goin' to be worse than ever this time, too, and we can't make shore ahead of her."

The clouds had gathered quickly, and the darkness had come upon them almost before the members of the party were aware of the approaching storm. The stiff breeze was a signal of the stronger wind that was to come. Before many minutes the bay would be kicking up a regular sea. Already the boat was rolling and plunging.

Tobias and the young men were working at the sails, hauling down everything except the jib. Time was valuable now. The squall came driving across the water not two hundred yards away.

"That rowboat is almost loose," Ruth cried, observing that the rope which held the small craft to the sailboat was nearly torn in two.

She started toward the stern of the sailboat, but Tobias was ahead of her. He leaned far over the edge and tried to retie the rope.

Tobias misjudged the onrush of the storm by a few seconds, and the squall broke upon him when he was unprepared. There was a sudden rush of wind, a beating of the rain, and the boat listed sharply. A sheet of water slapped the old skipper in the face. As the boat tilted, Tobias clutched at the gunwale of the boat and missed it. His hand released the rope of the smaller craft, and the dory drifted away. Even though the sudden careening had thrown her against the opposite side of the sailing vessel, Ruth recovered her balance and started forward to help Tobias.

She was too late. Tobias maintained his balance for only an instant and then splashed into the water.

"Oh, Tom, look! Tobias is overboard!"

Tom, who was at the wheel, heard Helen scream, but dared not turn around, for the safety of the entire group depended upon him. He must keep the boat to its course, for should they turn broadside, the craft would certainly upset.

Ruth and Helen scrambled to the edge of the boat, ignoring the rain. Ruth leaned as far over

as she dared and peered down into the water. The blinding rain and the darkness made it almost impossible to see. She caught no glimpse of the old sailor.

"We'll never get him!" Helen wailed to Chess, who had left Tom at the wheel and was also trying to sight the skipper. "He's lost!"

Though the girls continued to keep watch, Tobias Henn was not seen again, and in the gale it was impossible to change the course of the boat. The skipper had been swallowed up in the darkness, and the young folks had no way of knowing whether or not he could swim. The dory, too, had broken away and was lost.

Helen and Ruth no longer accepted inactivity, but obeyed the commands of Tom and Chess. All four knew that if they weathered the storm there must be no idle hands—or idle brains. In spite of the sharp list, in spite of the water that came pouring in over the side, Tom held the boat to its course. Ruth discovered that she was standing in water ankle deep and hunted about for something with which to bail. Chess helped her get out the pump.

The boat drove forward, and though it heeled until the water boiled along the side, the washboard kept out most of it. The steady work of Chess and Ruth at the pump began to show results.

Tom began to look for a buoy which would guide him to the harbor. Ruth left the pump and went to stand at Tom's side. Suddenly she stretched out her arm and pointed. Dead ahead, she saw—not the buoy, but the black threatening head of a rock!

"About, Tom!"

Tom caught sight of the protruding rock almost at the same instant. He spun the wheel, but the boat did not respond quickly enough. With a sickening thud the craft struck the rock!

CHAPTER XV

STRANDED

HELEN saw the looming rock a moment after Ruth did, and she gave one alarmed cry.

"The rocks, Tom!"

The situation was out of Tom's control. He was powerless to check the speed of the sailboat. As they struck, the stays snapped and the sail seemed to topple down and engulf them all. Instinctively, Ruth put up her hand to guard her head.

Water came pouring over the stern. The boat washed upon the rock and settled upon it. For the time being, the craft would not sink, although a huge wave could easily endanger the lives of all aboard.

"Are you hurt?" Tom demanded.

"N-o," Helen's voice trailed. "I guess I'm all right."

"We're all safe," Ruth offered. "Perhaps not safe, but at least not injured."

"We're in a pretty mess, that's certain," Tom

declared seriously. "I haven't any idea where we are or how we'll ever get to shore again."

The sky was lighter now and the worst part of the storm was over. The boat was not badly damaged, but it could not be used again until repaired. The first scare over, the young folks regarded their situation calmly.

"We must be about four miles from Cedar Grove Bay," Chess calculated. "We're in shallow water, or we shouldn't have struck the rocks. Land must be close."

Tom was leaning forward, peering through the dark at a dim outline.

"I can see land!" he shouted.

The others eagerly looked, and they, too, made out the shore in the distance.

"But how can we get there?" Ruth wanted to know. "Swim? I'm not at all sure I can make it."

"I'll test the water and see how deep it is."

Tom lowered himself into the water and found that it was just a little over his head.

"It's too deep to wade," he informed the others, as he reappeared at the surface. Then an anxious half hour passed.

Ruth was looking at the water line on the rock. Now she called the attention of the others to it.

"This must be high tide. See, the water is lower than it was when we first struck the rock. If we wait a little while, we can probably get to shore!"

Helen and the two young men believed that Ruth's reasoning was correct, and consequently the four decided to bide their time and take no unnecessary chances. The storm had cooled the air, and the young folks, wet as they were, soon shivered with the cold. There was nothing they could do except wait for the water to lower.

"Poor Tobias!" Ruth said once. "I hope he reached shore safely."

From time to time, Tom tested the depth of the water. Finally he announced that by swimming a few feet, it would be possible to wade the rest of the way to shore. With Chess looking after Helen and Tom helping Ruth, the four prepared to leave the rock. The boat was anchored with the one small anchor the craft carried.

"Sure you girls want to risk it?" Tom asked. "If you're afraid, Chess and I can go on and try to bring help."

"I'm a little afraid," Ruth admitted, "but I intend to try it."

"So do I!" Helen gritted.

With the assistance of Tom and Chess, Ruth and Helen managed the first twenty feet.

"It's shallow enough to walk now," Tom cried,

demonstrating the fact. The water came up to his armpits.

Helen who was a trifle shorter than her brother dared not try to wade until she had gone a dozen more feet ahead. Clinging to each other, and helping one another along, the four splashed through the surf toward the beach. The waves were gentle now, but all found it hard work to push their way through the water. More than once they stopped to rest, for it was tiring work.

"Too bad to leave the boat," Tom panted, "but we can't help it. Unless another squall comes up it can be salvaged to-morrow."

The four reached the shore and sank down on the beach to rest. Tom was the first to get up. He glanced about him curiously.

"This doesn't look like the mainland. Where do you suppose we are?"

Ruth, too, scrambled to her feet and looked about her in all directions.

"It looks to me like an island. There are a number of them in the bay."

"Wouldn't it be just our luck," Helen groaned, "to be stranded on an island?"

"You wanted excitement," Ruth reminded her.

"Yes, but not starvation. Do you suppose there's anything to eat here?"

"I may be mistaken about its being an island,"

Ruth returned. "But at all events, let's investigate."

With Tom and Ruth in the lead, the four started on a tour of inspection. A brief walk along the shore proved conclusively that Ruth had been correct. They were stranded on a small island!

The afternoon was already advanced when they left the cabin, and it was dusk before Ruth and her friends reached the island. By the time the four had walked around the place it was dark.

"I wish we had a fire," Helen chattered. "I'm cold."

"Why not wish for the moon? More chance of getting that!" Tom tried to joke his twin sister.

"I'm not so sure," Chess said, fishing in his pocket. He brought out a small box and held it up with no little satisfaction. "A water-proof match box! We'll have our fire, after all!"

Cheered at the prospect of having a chance to dry their wet clothing, the young folks applied themselves to the task of gathering wood. In the darkness it was not easy to find suitable dry sticks, but it was finally done.

Chess struck a match, but it did not light. He tried another, and this, too, failed to flame. Ruth, Tom, and Helen watched anxiously as Chess made the third attempt.

There was a little sputter of flame, and Chess carefully protected it from the wind. In a few minutes the fire was burning brightly. After gathering more wood, the young people sat down where it was warm to dry their clothing.

As they became more comfortable, their situation seemed less serious.

"What shall we do for shelter to-night?" Ruth asked presently. "There doesn't seem to be a fashionable hotel in sight."

While the others had remained near the fire, Tom had made a second tour of inspection, this time looking about for shelter. Now he spoke.

"There's nothing on the island except an old boathouse. We can fix that up for you girls. Chess and I can sleep out in the open. We've done it often enough when we've gone camping."

"That doesn't seem fair," Ruth half protested.

"Wait until you see your sleeping quarters. Not exactly luxurious!"

After the girls were warm and dry, the young men went with them to the boathouse that Tom had seen. The place was not inviting, but at least it offered shelter from the weather and the cool night air. Helen and Ruth were not poor sports, and made no complaint.

Tom and Chess left the girls, and after building a second fire, this one nearer the boathouse,

stretched themselves out upon the ground. After the storm, the sky had entirely cleared and the stars were shining.

For a long time Tom remained awake, for his mind was not free from worry. He had told Ruth that they would surely be rescued from the island early in the morning, and he believed they would be, but he could not know for sure. There was no food to be had until help reached them and, so far as he could tell, no water. Unless a rescue party found them the first thing in the morning, Tom determined to try to swim to the mainland. He was still worrying about the problem and about Tobias Henn, when he dropped off to sleep.

How long he slept, Tom did not know. Suddenly, for no reason at all, he found himself wide awake. He glanced at Chess, but his friend was sound asleep. Tom moved his cramped limbs, turned over, and tried to doze off again. He was provoked to find himself unable to sleep.

He was startled to hear a crackling, as though some one were walking over dry sticks. He sat up quickly and looked about him. The fire had died down during the night, but otherwise everything seemed exactly as it had a few hours before.

"I'm developing nerves," he ridiculed himself.

Then he heard the crackling noise again. This

time there was no mistake about it—he knew that some one was prowling about. Even as he became convinced that he was not alone, he saw the dim outline of two men near the spot where the first fire had been built!

"Wonder what's up now?" Tom asked himself in some alarm.

He resisted the temptation to reach over and awaken Chess, who was still sleeping at his side. Who were these strangers and why had they come to this little island? Tom could not answer the questions that came to his mind, but he thought it quite probable that the two men were the tramps they had encountered on Rossmore Island. More than likely they, too, had left the island in a boat and had been caught in the storm and forced to make a landing on this shore. If such were the case, Tom reasoned that the men would depart quietly without annoying his party. Unless the fire aroused their curiosity and caused them to investigate the island more carefully, they would probably leave without knowing that Tom and his friends were stranded there.

Tom knew he was not likely to be detected as long as he remained still, for the embers of the second fire had almost ceased to glow.

"As long as they don't bother us, no need to go hunting for trouble," Tom decided.

He watched the two strangers as they moved

about the spot where the first fire had been built. They had noticed the dead ashes, and were hunting about, probably for food. After a time, apparently discouraged, they turned and walked away in the opposite direction toward the shore.

The bay was now perfectly calm, as the high wind which accompanied the storm had gone down. A boat could be launched safely, and Tom judged that the two men were planning to leave the island without delay.

Tom was now in a quandary. He did not know what to do. If these men had landed on the island during the storm and were leaving, their boat offered Tom's party a means of escape. On the other hand, a second encounter with the two tramps would certainly result in a fight. Tom was not afraid for himself, but he wanted to follow the course which would be the best for the safety of Ruth and his sister. He felt it was probable that their party would be picked up as soon as daylight came, for boats passed the island nearly every hour, and surely some would come close in.

"I'll let them leave the island," Tom finally reasoned.

Tom kept watch for the remainder of the night, but the men did not reappear, and the young man assumed they had left the island for the mainland. Tom resolved to say nothing of

the episode to Helen and Ruth, for they already had enough to worry them.

Toward morning he dozed off in spite of his determination to remain awake, and when he opened his eyes he discovered that Chess was shaking him.

"Say, wake up. It's morning, and time for breakfast."

"Breakfast?" Tom groaned. "And I'm hungry enough to eat a tree!"

"Go right ahead. There's a nice maple over there that might suit you."

"Are the girls up?"

"Here they come now," Chess replied.

Tom turned around and saw Ruth and Helen coming toward them. The girls appeared bright and fresh, and gave little evidence of the hard night they had spent.

"You girls look as though you'd just stepped out of a beauty parlor," Tom declared, hunting in his pocket for his comb. "I feel like a wreck and probably look worse. How are you this morning, Ruth?"

"Hungry!"

"And I'm in the same condition," Helen offered, with a smile.

"Well, we can't eat until we reach the mainland, that's evident." Ruth began seriously. "What do you think of our situation, Tom?"

"If we aren't picked up by noon, I'll try to swim to the mainland. It ought not to be far away."

"We can't let you risk that, no matter what happens," Ruth returned quickly.

"Don't you think we can use the boat, Tom?" asked Helen.

"Hardly a chance, Sis," was the reply.

"What island do you imagine we're marooned on?" asked Ruth.

"Haven't the slightest idea. There seems to be nothing here except that old boathouse, so I judge it's a privately owned island that was once used as a sort of camping spot."

"Let's go to higher ground and look about," Chess suggested. "It's daylight now, and we can probably get a better idea of the place."

The sun was shining brightly, and Ruth and her friends were delighted to see that the clouds had entirely cleared away during the night. In the light of day, the island seemed smaller than ever and the situation less serious.

The young folks gained a higher point on the island, and from there surveyed the surrounding water in all directions. As Ruth took in the beauty of the tumbling blue water, it seemed impossible to believe that she and the others were really in a serious plight. In the morning sun-

light the water gleamed and the surface was broken only by splashes of white that shifted restlessly. Ruth turned her eyes toward the rocks, where they had been stranded the night before.

"Our boat is still there," she cried. "Lucky it wasn't washed off the rock during the night. If worst comes to worst, we might be able to mend it even without tools and perhaps we could get to the mainland."

Tom looked dubious.

Helen was looking in another direction, and now she called the attention of the others to a long strip of land, visible in the distance.

"That must be the mainland. It's only a matter of time until we're picked up, because boats will certainly pass this island."

"Let's hang up a flag or something to attract attention," Chess suggested.

"That's a good idea," Ruth assented. "There's an old sail in the boathouse where Helen and I slept. Let's get that."

The four went directly to the boathouse and found the canvas. Tom and Chess rigged up a long pole and fastened the sail to one end of it. The flag was then planted on the highest part of the island, where it would attract the attention of a passing boat. The task completed, the four sat down on the beach to wait for a rescue.

"Just like a scene in one of your movies, Ruth," Helen joked.

For a while, the four young people maintained a cheerful conversation, but as the time passed and no boat appeared, they relapsed one by one into silence. They were all hungry and discouraged, and the fact that they feared Tobias Henn was lost, did not add to their peace of mind.

An hour dragged by, and another. A number of sailboats were sighted far away, but they did not come close enough to the island to be hailed. It seemed to the four young people that time had never passed so slowly before.

Suddenly Chess sprang to his feet and began to wave his arms in excitement. The four had been watching the water directly in front of them, and had failed to notice the approach of a catboat from the other side of the island.

"Help! Help!" Chess yelled with all his might.

Ruth, Tom and Helen scrambled to their feet, and also waved their arms and shouted. Would their cries be heard? Would the boat pick them up? The four waited in an agony of suspense.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RESCUE

THE extreme effort to gain the attention of those aboard the passing catboat was unnecessary. The makeshift flag that Ruth and her friends had stationed on the highest point of the island had already attracted attention, and the boat was coming toward the shore to investigate.

As the boat drew up to the island, the four young folks ran joyfully down the beach to greet their rescuers.

"We were caught out in the storm," Tom briefly explained to the two young men who had the catboat in charge. "Can you take us to the mainland?"

"Surest thing. We saw your flag flying and thought probably some one was stranded here. The storm last night was a bad one. Came up suddenly and lots of boats were caught out."

The four climbed aboard the boat and took their seats, at the same time thanking the young men for their rescue.

"Pretty hungry, are you?" one of the young men asked Tom.

"Just about starved."

"Well, we can't offer you a banquet, but there's some biscuit and cheese in the cabin you can have. We always carry it along—never know what may happen. And we've got a big jug of fresh water."

The young man dived into the cabin and returned with the food. Ruth and her friends were not slow in pouncing upon it. The biscuits were hard and the cheese a trifle stale, but never had food tasted so good.

Their hunger satisfied, the four joked with their rescuers, and entirely forgot their discomfort.

"What island were we on?" Tom asked presently of one of the rescuers.

"Man by the name of Watson owns it, I believe. The island isn't used for much of anything now, I guess."

Under the skillful hands of the two young men, the catboat skimmed rapidly over the water. Soon familiar buoys were sighted, and the lighthouse was rounded.

Ruth and her friends again thanked the two young men who had rescued them, and, as they drew near the pier, prepared to leave the boat.

"We must be sights," Helen declared, looking at her crumpled dress.

"You aren't the first person that's been out all night in a storm," one of the young men consoled her. "Happens every once in a while around here. Strangers to these parts, aren't you?"

"Yes, we are," Ruth admitted. "We wouldn't have gone out in a sailboat alone. We hired a skipper to go along, but we lost him overboard. We're dreadfully worried for his safety."

"What's going on over there?" Chess scarcely waited for Ruth to finish her sentence. "See the crowd? Looks to me like some one else has just been rescued."

The group walked rapidly along the pier and came upon the crowd that had gathered. Ruth and the others pushed their way forward, and the sight they saw almost made them laugh, so great was their relief. In the center of the crowd stood Tobias Henn.

He caught sight of Tom and broke off in the midst of a sentence.

"Here you are! I was scared for you, alone in that boat!"

"We were worried about you," Ruth replied. "When you dropped off the stern of the boat and disappeared, we thought surely you had drowned."

"Takes more'n that to put old Tobias Henn out of the runnin'."

"But surely you didn't swim to shore?" Helen asked.

"No. Can't swim a stroke. I come up and caught hold of the rope on the dory. By that time you was swallowed up in the dark and I knowed it wasn't no use to try to git picked up in that gale. So I managed to git into the row-boat and drift around. Every minute I expects to upset, and I says to myself, 'You're done for this time, Tobias Henn!' But I weathered the storm, and here I am! Another boat picked me up this morning."

The old sailor enjoyed his part in the adventure and could not resist the temptation of turning to other persons who had just come up and repeating the story.

"I'm afraid your boat is smashed up," Tom interrupted. "We smashed against the rocks near Watson's Island."

"Them rocks is dangerŏus at high tide," Tobias informed Tom. "How bad is my boat stove in?"

"I couldn't tell very much about it last night, but I don't think she's damaged much. Let's send another boat after her now. We anchored her as best we could."

Tom's suggestion met with the approval of Tobias Henn, and immediately he made arrangements for salvaging the wrecked boat. Tom and

Chess decided to return to the rock to find out what damage had been done, but Ruth and Helen went directly to their hotel, for they were tired and dirty and wanted to change into clean clothing.

"No more boats for me!" Helen commented, as the two girls turned to leave the pier. "After this experience, I'm convinced my place is on dry land. Every time we decide on an innocent little outing something happens."

Helen and Ruth went to their rooms. After warm baths they changed into fresh clothing, and were surprised to find that they felt little the worse for the adventure. They had not slept well on the island, and at Helen's suggestion Ruth consented to try to spend the remainder of the morning in sleep.

She resolved to get up before lunch time, but once she closed her eyes she did not awake until Helen shook her.

"Time to get up, Ruthie. Tom and Chess are back from the island again and are waiting downstairs for us."

Ruth quickly brushed her hair and prepared to go down to the lobby with Helen. Chess and Tom, also in fresh clothing, met the girls, and the four went into the dining room. Over the first course, the young men told the girls the result of the trip.

"We brought the boat back with us," Tom related. "Tobias thinks we were lucky not to wreck the thing completely. As it is, the cost of the repair work won't be much."

"We can all chip in," Ruth announced.

"It won't be necessary. Tobias considers that he was entirely to blame for the accident, and won't hear of taking a cent other than what we agreed to pay him at first. Chess and I offered."

After lunch was over, Ruth and her three friends went to the drawing room for a brief chat.

"I've wasted a lot of time," Ruth reminded them. "I simply must get at my scenario this afternoon. And I think we should map out a plan to try to catch Dean Hollister. If we don't he'll likely try to get his hands on the remainder of my manuscript."

"Ruth's right," Tom agreed. "But I'm at a loss for an idea."

"Same here," Chess admitted.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the appearance of a uniformed hotel boy who went up and down the drawing room calling Ruth's name.

"Now what?" Ruth asked.

"We'll find out."

As Tom spoke, he motioned to the boy who

came to him and gave him a slip of paper. Tom handed it to Ruth who quickly read the note.

"Fred Orman wants to see me. He's in the lobby now. What do you suppose he wants?"

"Perhaps he has news of Hollister," Chess said hopefully.

"What luck!" Helen observed. "Orman knows more about Hollister than we. Maybe he'll have some suggestions."

"I'll go for Orman," Tom offered.

"Bring him here by all means, Tom," said Ruth.

Tom excused himself and left the drawing room. He returned in a few minutes, followed by Fred Orman. The formal greetings over, the young movie actor plunged directly into his subject.

"Miss Fielding, I wouldn't have troubled you had I known that your friends were back from the city. Probably they won't want me to interfere——"

"You aren't interfering. I've already told them how you helped me, and we need your aid again."

"Then, if you don't mind, I'd like to set a trap for Hollister. If we give him a chance I believe he'll overstep himself."

"You have a definite plan?" Ruth asked hopefully.

"Not much of one."

"Let's hear it," Tom suggested.

"I'm sure that Hollister is still in Cedar Grove Bay, because he expects to get his hands on some more of Miss Fielding's work."

"But why didn't he take all the scenes when he entered my room?"

"Perhaps he thought if you missed only a few scenes you wouldn't try to run him down."

"Or that you would believe you lost the pages through carelessness," Tom added.

"But what is your plan?" Ruth reminded Orman. "Tell us."

The young movie actor glanced about the room to make sure that no one was within hearing distance. Then he moved his chair closer to the group, and began to talk in a lower tone.

CHAPTER XVII

A TRAP IS SET

"My plan is a simple one," Fred Orman began, "but so simple I think it's good."

Helen was sitting on the edge of her chair and the others were equally impatient to hear what Orman had to offer.

"My idea is this. Let Miss Fielding go to the rocks as usual, and have her drop papers carelessly about on the cliff. We'll watch and see if Hollister comes along and picks them up. If he does, we can corner and accuse him."

"Sounds good to me," Tom approved.

"The plan ought to work," Chess agreed. "I'm sure he's planning to get his hands on valuable scenes that he thinks Ruth will write later on. That's probably why he didn't take the entire manuscript."

All four now turned to Ruth, for the final decision rested with her. Ruth had listened quietly while Orman explained his plan. Before giving her opinion on the subject she remained silent for a brief period, as she made it a point never to

arrive at hasty judgments without thinking a problem through to the end. Orman's plan appealed to her and she was not slow in announcing her approval.

"I think the plan is worth trying," she said. "Mr. Orman, we certainly want you to know that we appreciate your aid."

"Oh, that's all right," Orman said rather uncomfortably. "I'm glad to do it for you, Miss Fielding. And I'm interested on my own account, too."

"We'll combine forces against Hollister," Helen put in. "He won't have much chance against five of us."

"If you don't mind," Orman went on, addressing Ruth, "I'd like the job of shadowing Hollister myself. I'd like to find out where he stays and what he's up to."

"You're welcome to the job," Ruth smiled.

Tom glanced at his watch.

"What's to prevent us from going to the cliff now?" he asked. "I'd like to start the ball rolling."

"So should I," Ruth announced.

The others nodded agreement with Tom's suggestion.

"I'll go to my room and get some papers now," Ruth said quickly, getting up from her chair.

She left the drawing room, and the others

chatted together during her absence. She returned in a few minutes with several pages torn from a notebook. With the four looking over her shoulder, she scribbled a few meaningless sentences on the paper.

"Hollister won't profit much by those ideas," Helen chuckled.

The young folks left the hotel and walked rapidly to the cliff where Ruth usually did her writing. Orman took the papers that Ruth gave him and scattered them about in a careless manner. First, however, he looked carefully about to make certain that Hollister was not in the vicinity to watch his actions.

"Who is to stay here and watch for Hollister?" Tom asked presently. "It may mean hours or days of waiting."

"I'll watch," Orman offered. "I can hide behind one of these rocks, and he won't see me until he gets right up to me."

"We can't let you do all the watching. We'll take turns. Chess and I will do our share, too."

"Do you think it's enough for one to stay alone?" Ruth questioned. "In my opinion, Hollister isn't to be trifled with. Especially, if he's caught taking the papers. He has the strength of a giant."

"That's so." Tom thought of the way that Hollister had treated Orman at their previous

meeting. "At least two of us should watch together."

"I'd feel easier in my mind if you did."

Chess spoke up.

"You folks go back to the hotel. Orman and I will stay here for the first hour, and then we can shift."

"I'll bring you a book to read," Helen offered.

The young men agreed upon a definite schedule and then parted. Tom, Ruth and Helen returned to the hotel. The following hour, Tom replaced Chess, and between the three of them they maintained a careful watch during the entire day.

"What luck, Tom?" Ruth asked the young man at the dinner table that night. Helen and Chess were of course dining with them, and at Ruth's suggestion Orman had been included in the party. No attempt had been made to watch the cliff after dark.

"No luck at all, Ruth. All I have to show for the day is a beautiful sunburn."

"Don't mind that," Helen observed, with a grin. "When you go back home every one will think you've been on a yacht trip."

"That's too bad!" Ruth was more sympathetic. "Shall we call it off?"

"Not much!" Tom was firm. "I don't mind the sun—I was kidding."

"If we stick to the plan, I'm sure we'll get results," Orman maintained quietly.

The subject of conversation shifted, and soon the lost pages of the scenario were forgotten. As the dinner progressed, Ruth drew Fred Orman out of his shell, and all were surprised to find that the young man possessed a great deal of dry humor. His remarks more than once made the young people burst into laughter. Other parties in the dining room looked with interest at the table in the far corner of the room, wondering what the fun was all about.

As a result of Orman's plan, Helen and Ruth were thrown upon their own resources during the daytime. Ruth found this to her satisfaction, for she spent the hours on her scenario. She selected a secluded spot on the cliff, and with the portable typewriter, wrote at a furious rate.

She sometimes returned to her favorite spot overlooking the bay. "As bait," Helen put it. Patiently, Tom, Chess, and Orman watched for Hollister.

Had the man left the place? Did he suspect a plot and deliberately stay away from the cliff? They could not know, and as several days went by and still Hollister did not appear, even Orman began to lose heart.

"I guess my plan was a silly one," he told Ruth one day. "I've just wasted your time."

"Not my time," Ruth corrected. "And I'm certain Tom and Chess haven't minded."

"As long as Ruth won't let me tag around with her, I might as well be there as anywhere," Tom put in quickly.

"Then we'll try it a few days longer," and Orman brightened. "But if nothing happens within a day or two I suppose we'd better give up."

"We won't give up!" Ruth announced shortly. "I'm determined to find out who took my papers. We'll take a new line of attack."

Orman had called at the hotel to meet Tom, Chess and the girls, and to report any news he might have. He had caught no glimpse of Hollister, although he had frequented the places where he thought the man might be found.

Feeling that the young man was still without means, Tom insisted on making Orman another loan, to be paid back when he got his new movie position, which seemed fairly certain now.

"Let's be off for the cliff," Chess said, looking at his watch. "I always feel more enthusiastic after I've had my quota of breakfast rolls."

"I may as well go along," Tom volunteered, as Fred Orman and Chess prepared to leave.

The young men took leave of the girls and went directly to their hiding place on the cliff. Ruth spent the early part of the morning in her

room, writing on her scenario. Helen tried to interest herself in a book, but for her the time dragged. At eleven o'clock she tossed the book aside and addressed Ruth.

"You've been working all morning. Don't you need some air?"

"That's what I've been producing. Hot air!"

"Well, I mean sea air. Honestly, Ruth, you'll feel better if you come for a walk."

"Where do you want to go?" Ruth obligingly put aside her scenario, taking pains to lock it in the desk.

"Oh, any place," Helen returned. "We might walk to the cliff and see if anything has happened."

"All right." Ruth searched for her hat.

She really disliked to leave her work, but as Helen said, she needed the exercise. She knew, too, that Helen hated to take a walk by herself.

The girls walked down the street, taking plenty of time to look into the attractive store windows.

"I love to window-shop," Helen declared. "It's so much more economical than inside shopping."

"Keep on that way and you'll make Chess a good wife," Ruth teased.

For once, Helen could not think of an apt retort. Arm in arm, the two continued toward

the bay. Deliberately they selected a roundabout way, for they were in no hurry to reach their destination. Presently they took a path that led to the higher rocks, and Helen began to puff.

"Not so fast, Ruth Fielding! I'm not an Alpine climber."

"This is good for reducing," Ruth laughed, but she paused to give her friend an opportunity to catch her breath.

"Can you see Tom and Chess from here?" Helen asked.

"See them? Of course not, goose! What would be the idea of their staying there if they stuck themselves out where Hollister would be sure to see them?"

Helen was crushed, but only for the moment.

"Ruth, they aren't hiding now!" she cried. "Tom and Chess and Orman are all out on the cliff where we scattered the papers. And they're prancing around like demons!"

"Can you see Hollister?" Ruth demanded.

"No, I can't," Helen cried, catching hold of her chum's hand. "But something's up! Let's find out what it is!"

CHAPTER XVIII

ORMAN STRIKES A BLOW

THE morning passed slowly for Tom, Chess and Fred Orman. They remained in a hiding place near the rock where Ruth occasionally dropped worthless papers, and tried to kill time with conversation. The three young men were discouraged, but disliked to admit defeat. An hour dragged by, then another.

"Fellows, I guess it's foolish to stick around here another day," said Orman. "I appreciate the way you've helped me, but I can't ask you to waste any more time. I'm afraid Hollister has left town."

"Looks like it," Tom admitted rather listlessly.

"Tom and I don't mind watching," Chess added; "but I'm afraid it's no use."

"The plan was a good one, and I don't see——"

"Not so loud," Chess warned Tom in a whisper. "Look over there! Some man is on the cliff now!"

While the young men talked, a man had taken

a station on the rock where the papers were scattered. Tom and Orman eagerly looked out from behind the sheltering rock and surveyed the stranger.

"Hollister!" Orman whispered, in excitement.

Chess started forward, but Tom put out a hand to stop him.

"Not so fast! Wait until we see if he picks up the papers!"

With eyes riveted upon Dean Hollister, the young men bided their time. The papers had been scattered in such a way that Hollister could not help but notice them.

Hollister looked carefully about him to make certain that no one was in sight, and then began to search along the rock. Almost immediately he gave a low cry as his eyes fastened greedily upon the sheets from Ruth's notebook. He stooped and quickly picked up the pages.

At that instant, Tom, Chess, and the young movie actor leaped forward and surrounded him.

"So you're up to your old tricks, Dean Hollister!" cried Orman, as, his eyes flashing, he confronted his enemy.

Dean Hollister whirled about and faced the three young men. In his hands he still held the papers. A look of fear momentarily passed over his face, and then an evil grin replaced it.

"Take care what you say, little shrimp!"

Tom pressed nearer.

"Take care yourself," he warned angrily, his fists clenching.

Hollister's answer was another insulting leer.

"We've got your number this time," Chess cried. "You're caught in the act!"

"Caught—nothing!"

"And we know what happened to Miss Fielding's scenario scenes," Orman added. "Taking things that don't belong to you is getting to be a pretty bad habit!"

"You can't prove anything!"

"Can't I? Wait and see what I can do! I know why I was discharged, and, Hollister, you're going to pay for that!"

"You prattle like an infant."

"We'll show you who prattles!" Tom stepped forward, and with a sudden movement of his hand, jerked the papers from Hollister's hand.

Hollister seemed afraid of Tom, and although he glared with hatred at the young man, dared not try to regain the pages.

"You haven't any evidence against me," he snarled. "I have a right to pick up any loose papers I please. You can't stop me, and neither can that thief!"

Hollister indicated Fred Orman. Before Tom or Chess could make a move, the young movie actor, his eyes flashing, leaped forward. His

right arm shot out, and with a smack his fist landed under Hollister's chin.

"That's what I can do!" he cried. "Hollister, you big coward, we'll settle our score right now!"

Hollister staggered back from the blow, but did not fall. His powerful frame and firm flesh protected him from the blow. His face flushed, and his hand went up to his chin. Instead of lurching forward as Tom and Chess expected him to do, he slunk back a step, and whined:

"You can't make me fight—it's three against one!"

Suddenly he sprang forward, snatched the papers out of Tom's hand, wheeled, and ran down the slope toward the beach. Tom sprang after him and would have followed, but Chess stopped him.

"Let him go. The papers are worthless, and it won't do us any real good to catch him. While we know he's guilty, the mere fact that he picked up papers here on the cliff wouldn't be court evidence against him."

"You're right," Tom agreed regretfully. "If we had a fight, he might charge us with assault. It would make a nasty mess, and we'd probably land in jail."

"I'd just as soon spend a few days in jail," Orman declared bitterly, "if I could have a chance to pound that rascal into jelly!"

"He deserves it," Tom replied. "But we don't want Ruth's name mixed up in the affair."

"Of course not," Orman came back quickly. "I didn't think of that."

The young men watched Hollister as he fled down the slope. He looked fearfully over his shoulder, and then slackened his speed when he saw that he was not being followed. A moment later he disappeared behind a rock.

At this point, Ruth and Helen, slightly out of breath, reached the cliff. In the excitement the young men had failed to notice the approach of the two girls.

"Tom, what happened?" Ruth asked quickly.

"Hollister fell into our trap," Tom replied, and quickly told the girls of what had happened.

"You did right," Ruth said when the story was finished. "We have no court evidence. But now that we know he is the guilty one, we have gained an advantage. Probably he'll be afraid and will leave us entirely alone."

"I'll venture to say he'll skip out of town before night," Chess offered.

Fred Orman said nothing. He had his own opinion of Dean Hollister and his methods.

"Ruth's scenario will be safe at any rate," Tom declared. "It's always under lock and key."

"I'm not so sure about that," Orman spoke quietly but firmly. "Hollister is a coward, but

when he needs money he doesn't give up easily. I feel certain he's hard up right now."

"Probably discharged from his position after you left," Tom guessed.

"Miss Fielding's scenario means money to Hollister. He may get scared away without troubling her again—but I doubt it."

"What can we do?" Ruth wanted to know.

"I wouldn't go out on the cliffs alone," Orman advised. "And we'll all watch for Hollister. I'll make it my particular job to camp on his trail."

Dean Hollister's next move was to come sooner than even Orman anticipated.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DANCE

"It's finished!"

Ruth Fielding rolled a sheet of typewritten paper from her portable machine and with pardonable pride surveyed the friends who were grouped about her on the cliff. Tom was stretched out full length at her feet, and Helen and Chess were seated near by.

"Three cheers for Ruth!" Chess cried enthusiastically. "Let's celebrate the big event!"

"You mean your scenario is finished?" Helen asked. "Every bit of it?"

"Every word! And let me tell you I feel as though I'd suddenly been let out of prison. I've slaved over the thing and rewritten it so many times that now I honestly don't know whether it's good or not."

"You've had a lot of grit to stick with the thing to the end," Tom observed. "If you don't win, all I can say is I want to see the scenario that does!"

"I'll send it off on the morning mail," Ruth announced. "Then my fate is out of my hands."

For a week, Ruth had worked furiously on her manuscript in an effort to finish it by the required date. During that time, never once had she seen Dean Hollister. Fred Orman believed he had successfully traced Hollister to a rooming house, but there his information ended.

In spite of the additional work, Ruth found time to enjoy the vacation with her friends and to attend a second committee meeting at the home of Mrs. Vanderwalker.

"To-night's the date of the charity ball," Chess recalled. "I'm all set for the grand blow-out. I suppose the 'soup and fish' must come out of the moth balls."

"Certain!" Helen informed him. "Unless you intend to disgrace the rest of us. This dance is a swell affair."

"If any one tries to high-tone me, I'll come home!"

"Don't worry, they won't," Ruth comforted him. "Mrs. Vanderwalker has no intention of making the ball a stiff, boresome affair."

"Well, I don't care, anyway—if Helen will give me all the dances I want."

"I think Chess is getting stage fright," Tom grinned. "He doesn't want to take part in our stunt."

"Stage fright nothing!"

"Our little act is one of the first on the program," Ruth explained. "Then our evening is free. Mrs. Vanderwalker asked me to help receive, but I refused because I don't want to have a single worry to-night."

"We'll see to it that you don't." Tom took Ruth's hand in his own and in a pleading tone added: "Can I have the first six dances, Ruth?"

"Tom, you're entirely too enterprising. I can't make rash promises." But she smiled indulgently as she spoke.

The young people chatted together for a time. Presently Tom and Chess escorted the girls to the hotel, promising to return for them at eight-thirty that evening.

"It's to be a gay evening," Ruth declared as they parted.

"High-o," Tom agreed enthusiastically.

The hands of the clock on Ruth's dressing table told the girls that it was thirty-five minutes after eight. Ruth, more attractive than ever in a blue silk evening gown, was impatiently waiting for Helen to finish her dressing.

"Helen, do hurry! We've already made Tom and Chess wait five minutes."

"Do you think I look all right?" Helen asked anxiously as she surveyed herself in the full length mirror.

"Helen Cameron, if you're fishing for compliments, you won't get any! You know perfectly well you look gorgeous! Now do put on this cape and come on!"

Ruth slipped her own evening cape over her shoulders. Before she left the room she went to the desk to make certain that she had locked it.

"I guess the scenario is safe," she decided as she locked the door after Helen. "I'll send it off the first thing in the morning and get it off my mind."

The two girls were greeted by Tom and Chess the instant they stepped from the elevator, and the glances of admiration cast upon them more than satisfied them.

"You look great to-night," Tom declared as they rode along the brightly lighted street. "What have you been doing to yourself, Ruth?"

"Nothing special. You look pretty nifty yourself in a tux, Tom."

Chess evidently whispered an appropriate remark to Helen, for she blushed with pleasure.

A throng of brilliantly dressed women and distinguished appearing men had already gathered at the Vanderwalker summer home when Ruth and her friends arrived. The orchestra hidden behind a screen of palms, was in the midst of an

inviting dance number. Helen could scarcely keep her feet still.

The preliminary greeting over, the young people wasted no more time. To the strains of a rollicking fox-trot, Helen and Ruth were swung out upon the floor. Tom was a good dancer and a strong leader. Gliding smoothly and gracefully along, Ruth was soon lost to everything save the rhythm of the music and Tom. Many a look of admiration was cast in her direction, but she ignored the glances, for this evening she was determined to permit Tom to monopolize her time. Tom was of the same mind, and glared at every young man that dared look twice upon Ruth with a speculative eye.

The dance ended and the young folks met in one corner of the room. When the orchestra struck up again Helen and Ruth exchanged partners. As soon as the next dance was over, the four again chatted together.

"There's to be a Russian dancing act at this point of the program," Ruth told her friends. "Then our stunt comes."

Ruth had written a clever skit portraying a day in a moving picture studio as it actually was, and then as the public imagined it to be. As the four took their places in the center of the floor, the guests watched them with interest, for it was

known that Ruth and Tom were connected with the moving picture profession.

Tom took the part of a director, Chess became a camera man, and Helen and Ruth acted the parts of moving picture stars. The skit was a short one, but every line was packed with humor. The four threw themselves into their parts, and time after time the audience burst into laughter.

The applause was voluminous, but Ruth refused an encore. The four bowed their appreciation and escaped to their seats. The music struck up again, and the dance went on.

It was a glorious evening. Ruth and Helen scarcely missed a dance, and then only because they were so tired that their feet refused to carry them. The time passed swiftly, and almost before they realized it, the hour was late.

"Mrs. Vanderwalker has a fortune teller in the library," Ruth reminded her friends. "Let's have our fortunes told and then go home."

"Let's!" Helen cried. "We'll find out if Ruth's scenario is destined to win the prize!"

A large group of people had congregated in the library, and Ruth and her friends were forced to await their turns. The entire room was disguised as a gypsy camp, and the fortune teller crouched over a fire that had been built upon a brick base.

"It's dangerous to have an open fire like that," Ruth whispered.

Her turn came at last, and she seated herself on a low camp chair in front of the fortune teller. Helen, Chess, and Tom crowded close to her to hear the prediction. The fortune teller studied Ruth's face intently before speaking.

"You have will power that enables you to meet trying situations," she began in a low voice. "I see a brilliant future, but a troubled one. A happy home awaits you—but far in the distance. You will achieve success, but first you will be troubled by a great loss. You will——"

The fortune teller broke off in the middle of the sentence and gave a piercing scream. She had leaned too near the fire, and her loose shawl and dress were ablaze!"

CHAPTER XX

RUTH SUFFERS A LOSS

RUTH and her friends had failed to notice that the fortune teller was leaning dangerously close to the open fire, for they were intent upon her words and had their eyes fastened upon her face. The girl's dress and shawl were flaming before any one in the room realized what was happening.

Beating widly but ineffectively at her clothing, the fortune teller sprang from her chair with a scream of fear. Others in the room also cried out in alarm.

Before those about her could recover from the surprise, Ruth was up from the camp chair. She snatched the burning shawl from the girl's shoulder and threw it upon the floor. Chess and Helen, instantly alert, pressed forward and stamped vigorously upon it to put out the flames.

Tom who stood near Ruth, grabbed a long cloth runner from the library table, and wrapped it about the struggling girl. He held her tightly, for in her fright she would have broken away.

Making use of the table runner, Ruth beat at the fire until it was out.

The danger over, the fortune teller sank weakly into a chair and began to sob. Ruth and Helen put their arms about the girl and tried to comfort her. The cries of fright had penetrated to the ballroom, and the dancers were crowding into the library.

"Are you burned?" Ruth asked anxiously.

The trembling girl still clung to Ruth.

"I don't k-now," she managed to stammer.

"I think she's all right," Ruth decided in relief. "Still pretty weak from fright, but otherwise all right. Her burns are slight."

"We'll take her to the dressing room." Mrs. Vanderwalker had reached the spot, and now came forward to assist the girls. Together they led the fortune teller from the room.

Tom was trying to prevent more people from crowding into the library.

"Don't push! Everything is all right. The danger is over!"

At his command, the crowd gradually backed away, and as the orchestra struck up again, many dancers returned to the ballroom, still discussing the incident.

Ruth and Helen and Mrs. Vanderwalker took the fortune teller directly to the dressing room. A maid was sent for bandages and ointment. A

brief examination by a physician who chanced to be present showed that the girl was not severely burned, thanks to the quick action on the part of Ruth Fielding and her friends.

"I can't tell you how much I thank you, Miss Fielding," the girl declared, taking Ruth's hand. And you too!" She indicated Helen. "I owe my life to you two. I only wish I could show you how I feel."

"We weren't the only ones that helped put out the fire," Ruth returned. "We only did what any one else would have done."

"Perhaps," Mrs. Vanderwalker smiled. "Nevertheless, I dread to think what might have happened had you not acted quickly. Miss Fielding, you have rendered me many services to-night—and I won't forget."

"Not at all," Ruth assured her easily.

After making sure that the girl was resting comfortably, Ruth and Helen returned to the ballroom, to find Tom and Chess. They saw the young men in one corner of the room, explaining to curious persons just how the accident had taken place. Tom and Chess flashed a glance of relief at the girls as they drew near.

"Let's go home," Ruth suggested. "It's late and I'm tired."

The girls put on their capes and Tom went for the car. The four were glad to leave, for

their part in the fire incident had made them a bit conspicuous.

"It's been a real evening," Ruth declared as soon as they were comfortably seated in the automobile. "In spite of the excitement, I had a glorious time. Don't know when I've had so much fun."

"Same here," Tom commented enthusiastically.

Chess squeezed Helen's hand to let her know that he felt the same way.

"And there wasn't a woman there that could hold a candle to Ruth or Helen, when it comes to looks," Tom continued, with a touch of pride.

"Tom, you base flatterer!" Ruth protested, but nevertheless pleased at the compliment. "There were some gorgeous evening gowns worn."

"Who cares about gowns?" Tom scoffed. "I prefer a pretty face and one that has character behind it."

Ruth accepted the compliment as a sincere one, for Tom was not given to exaggerated praise.

"The fire didn't ruin the party," Ruth remarked, changing the subject. "The ball was a grand success from start to finish. When I send my scenario to New York on the morning mail the last worry will be off my mind!"

"The prize and the honor will be worth the work you've gone to," Chess said.

"I wish I had your confidence—I'm not so sure

of that prize! The fortune teller said I would have a lot of trouble. Perhaps she meant I would fail in the contest."

"I haven't any faith in fortune tellers," Helen announced.

"Neither have I. This girl wasn't a professional, and, anyway, she didn't get a chance to tell me what sort of trouble I am to meet. I was only joking."

They reached the hotel, and Tom and Chess escorted the girls into the lobby. As they chatted for a moment, Ruth was reminded of something.

"Tom, I never returned the motion picture magazine I borrowed so long ago. I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"Don't worry about that, Ruth. It doesn't matter—I haven't needed it."

"It matters to me. If you'll wait a minute, I'll go up to my room and get it. I know you are keeping files of those magazines for business purposes.

Helen remained in the lobby with Chess and Tom, while Ruth went upstairs after the magazine. She went directly to her room on the second floor. Unlocking the door, she flung it open, and switched on the light. The sight that met her eyes caused her to gasp in astonishment.

"What in the world——"

She surveyed the room in dismay. She had

left it in perfect order, and now she saw papers scattered upon the floor in all directions.

The desk was open, and Ruth knew that she had carefully locked it before going to the dance!

In alarm she ran to the desk. With fear in her heart, she thrust her hand into the drawer where she had put the precious scenario. Her hand came out empty! The scenario was gone!

CHAPTER XXI

A WILD RIDE

RUTH FIELDING sank limply into a chair and dropped her head upon her hands. It seemed unbelievable that any one could be heartless enough to take the scenario. She had destroyed her notes, and now she had nothing to show for the work of many weeks—everything was gone! She could not rewrite the manuscript in time for the competition, even had she the courage to attemp the discouraging task.

"It's too mean!" she girl told herself miserably. "Too mean!"

Mechanically she searched the desk again—hopelessly, for the disordered appearance of the room told only too clearly the story of the theft. Ruth examined the lock on the drawer of the desk. It had been broken.

She forced herself to action. Hurrying down the hall, she rang for the elevator. The boy did not respond as quickly as he should have, and impatiently Ruth turned to the stairs.

Helen, Chess, and Tom, who awaited her re-

turn in the lobby, saw her coming toward them, and the worried look on her face warned them that something unusual had happened.

"What's the matter, Ruth?" Tom demanded.

"My scenario is gone!"

"Gone?" Shocked surprise was evident on all faces.

"Yes, stolen! Some thief entered the room while we were at the dance. The place is a mess—just come and look at it!"

"The dirty crook!" Tom exploded. "Hollister again!"

"I'm sure of it!" Ruth cried, a hard gleam coming into her eyes.

"He won't get by with it this time!" Chess declared in anger.

"The first thing to do is to report the theft to the management," Tom decided.

Abruptly, he left the three and went to the clerk's desk. He told the story quickly, and at once the hotel manager was summoned. With the four young people he went to the room occupied by Helen and Ruth.

"The thief must have entered by the window or else with a skeleton key," the manager decided after a brief examination. "The clerk has not given out the key to any one."

Tom was hunting through a few of the worthless papers scattered about on the floor, search-

ing for a more definite clue. His eyes fastened upon an object, and with a low cry he picked it up.

"What is it?" Ruth demanded as she hurried forward.

Tom held the object to the light.

"A cuff link. A gold one! Probably Hollister lost it. If we catch him, we'll have some evidence."

"Let's ask the maid if she has seen any one prowling about."

At Ruth's suggestion, the manager pressed a button, and almost immediately a maid appeared at the door. Ruth questioned her.

"There has been a theft here. Have you seen any one enter or leave this room during the last three hours?"

The maid shook her head, her eyes growing large at the sight of the disorderly room.

"No, ma'am, there ain't been no one in here that I know of. But I did see a queer-lookin' man just as I was comin' on duty headin' down the back stairs. I guess he wasn't one of the help. Seemed sort of scared at meetin' me."

"Can you describe him?"

"No, ma'am, I can't. He was just a big man—had huge shoulders."

"That's Hollister!" Chess exclaimed triumphantly.

"The next problem is to catch him," Ruth cried.

"The car is outside," Tom reminded her. "Let's run him down."

"We don't know which way he went," Chess put in shortly.

"We might try that rooming house near the docks," Tom suggested. "Fred Orman thinks Hollister rooms there, and it's possible we may find him."

"It's a long chance, but it's better than to stand here doing nothing!" As Ruth spoke she flung off her cape and replaced it with a more convenient coat. "We must hurry! If Hollister has any brains at all he'll get out of town just as fast as he can."

"I'm going along," Helen announced, following Ruth's example by replacing her cape with a coat.

The four young folks and the manager of the hotel hurried down to the lobby and outside. Tom led the group directly to the spot where he had parked the automobile. Ruth and Helen wasted no time waiting for assistance, but climbed into the car without ceremony. The manager did not get in, for evidently he had no desire to take part in the chase.

"I'll notify the police," he began anxiously. "If I can be of any aid——"

"Thanks," Ruth returned shortly, for she felt that the hotel manager lacked courage. "I think we can attend to Hollister ourselves if we find him!"

Ruth had taken the place at Tom's side in the front seat.

"Look out!" Tom warned, as he threw in his clutch and shifted gears.

The car backed from the curb, and Tom headed it down the street toward the docks.

"Step on her," Chess cried encouragingly from the rear seat.

"Not too fast," Ruth cautioned more wisely, "or we'll be held up for speeding. Then our chance of finding Hollister will be mighty slim."

Tom did not reply, for his attention was centered on his driving. He appreciated Ruth's suggestion, however, and although he crowded the speed limit, he never exceeded it.

Tom selected the side streets in an attempt to avoid all traffic. As the hour was late, few automobiles were on these streets. The car approached the water front, and Tom and the others peered anxiously at the houses.

"You can scarcely see the numbers," he complained. "Watch for one hundred and twenty-six. I think that's the one."

Ruth, Helen and Chess strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of the rooming house where they

believed Hollister might be staying. Ruth was the first to distinguish the number.

"There it is—on the left-hand side of the road." She pointed to one of the gloomiest and ugliest rooming houses on the street.

Tom quickly brought the car to a stop, and both he and Chess jumped out.

"Better stay here until we see what's up," Tom advised the girls. "This may be a rough party!"

Tom and Chess left the girls, ran up the steps to the house, and rang the bell. Ruth and Helen, watching from the car, waited anxiously until they saw the door open.

"Well?" A slovenly appearing woman, evidently the landlady, opened the door. There was an unpleasant twist to her voice.

"We're looking for Dean Hollister. Does he room here?"

"He did room here." The woman eyed Tom with suspicion. "What's it to you?"

"We have important business with him." Tom did not care to take the landlady into his confidence.

"That's what the other fellow said. There's some funny things going on to-night."

"What other fellow?"

"I don't know his name. He came about ten minutes ago and asked for this man Hollister same as you did."

"What was this fellow like?"

"He was a small guy—about so big." The woman indicated the height with her hand.

"Orman!" Chess guessed.

"Where is Hollister now?" Tom quizzed. The woman's unwillingness to give information made him impatient.

"Can't tell you. He left about five minutes before the other man come. Took his baggage and cleaned out in a car."

"Hollister is a criminal," Tom explained hurriedly. "If you can help us, we'll be grateful."

The information had a curious effect upon the woman. Immediately she became more friendly.

"So you ain't friends of his, eh? I'll tell you all I know, because he beat if off without paying some extras he owed. He took the cliff road. I watched him."

Thanking the landlady and giving her a placating fifty cents, Tom and Chess, without bothering to ask additional questions, turned and ran back to the car. Ruth and Helen had heard a portion of the conversation, and Chess supplied the missing information.

"Orman's on the job!" Ruth exclaimed. "Good for him! But it's queer he went after Hollister this very night."

"Speed up!" Chess advised again as the car started. "Minutes count now!"

This time Ruth said nothing, for the car had reached the outskirts of the city, and as they took the cliff road the danger of being held up for speeding was very slight. The danger of traveling at a high rate of speed was greater, however, for while the road was a paved one and well built, the curves were sharp and the road was not wide.

Tom was a skillful driver, and Ruth trusted entirely to his judgment. He would take no unreasonable risks, she knew. And if they were to catch Hollister there was no time for slow driving.

The night was an almost perfect one, but the young people were far too intent upon the hunt to appreciate beauty. They did not notice the large, round moon and the soft light it shed over the water of the bay. The moonlight had a more practical value—it made the task of watching the road easier for Tom.

A portion of the road ran along the shore, and then gradually wound away from the bay to the higher cliffs. The car had traveled scarcely a mile along the bay when the four, almost at the same time, sighted a car ahead of them.

"Careful, Tom!" Helen cried.

Tom eased on the brake. The car stopped a

few feet from the other automobile which was stationary at the side of the road. A second car, without lights, was parked near it.

Ruth swung the door of the car open and jumped out before Tom could help her. The others were close behind. A brief investigation showed that both cars were deserted.

"Where could they have gone?" Helen asked.

Tom and Ruth were looking about them in all directions, attempting to find a trace of the occupants of the two cars.

Tom caught the first startling glimpse. A short distance away, plainly visible in the moonlight, were two struggling men.

"There they are!"

The figures were unmistakable. The one man was tall and huge of frame, his opponent was short and of slight build.

"It's Hollister!" Helen screamed, as she too saw the men.

"And Orman," added Ruth.

"Looks as if the big brute meant to kill Orman," put in Chess.

CHAPTER XXII

HOLLISTER AT BAY

As Helen screamed, Hollister delivered a heavy blow on Orman's chest. He followed it with one for the jaw. He struck out with terrific force. Fred Orman, however, dodged, and came back with an equally hard blow, striking Hollister on the chest.

"Bravo!" Tom yelled, as he sprang forward. Chess was close at his heels.

In the moonlight, the forms of the two men were clearly outlined. Orman appeared grotesquely small in comparison with his opponent.

The two were fighting so fiercely, each giving and taking half a dozen blows, that neither Hollister nor Fred Orman had observed the automobile that had stopped at the side of the road. The young movie actor had no thought that friends were near to offer aid. He knew that he was no match for Dean Hollister and that he could not protect himself, but he had no intention of accepting defeat without a fight for his own rights. Bravely he stood his ground.

Hollister did not hear Tom's shout. He crouched like a cat ready to spring upon its prey.

Calm and undaunted at the beating he had received previously from Hollister, the movie actor kept his eyes fastened upon the man, ready to anticipate another aggressive move. Quick as Orman was on his feet, he was as putty in the hands of a fighter such as Hollister.

With a horrible, leering grin upon his face, Dean Hollister edged closer and closer. Then suddenly, without warning, his arm shot out, his fist landed squarely and with a thud as it came in contact with human flesh. The young movie actor tried to duck back, but misjudged the blow. He staggered, and then crumpled.

"He *has* killed Orman!" Helen wailed.

Ruth made no reply. She had not followed Tom and Chess, for she was sensible enough to realize that in this physical encounter, she would be only a hindrance. Instead, she remained with Helen, close enough to see the fight and to help in any emergency.

Tom and Chess hoped to spring upon Hollister before the man was aware of their presence. But in racing over the rocks toward him, their feet scraped and the noise attracted his attention. He turned about and saw them. Fear shone in his eyes. He was more than an equal match for either Tom or Chess, but in spite of

his superior strength he was afraid to face the situation.

Before he fled, he could not resist an evil temptation. His face couvulsed with hate, he savagely kicked Orman, who still lay in a heap on the ground. The action delayed his flight and gave Tom and Chess their opportunity.

"Stop, you big coward!" Tom shouted as he leaped upon the man.

"You're caught this time!" Chess cried as he too sprang.

Tom's hold was not a good one. He clung tightly, but Hollister, with a deft twist of his body, broke away. Tom lunged after him, missed, and fell. Chess, too, failed to stop him.

With a harsh laugh, Dean Hollister wheeled and bolted for the car he had left at the side of the road. As he ran he buttoned his coat closer about him.

Ruth and Helen, huddled in the shadow near the automobile, saw him coming. With one accord they fell upon him, and so unexpected was the attack that Hollister stumbled and fell flat on the ground. Before he could recover, Ruth promptly sat down on him. Helen added her weight, and held his arms.

Hollister struggled furiously, but the girls threw every ounce of their strength into the battle.

"Hold him, Ruth!"

Tom had regained his feet and now came running toward the automobile. Chess was close behind him, and Orman was limping in the rear. The movie actor had no intention of retiring from the fight.

Tom and Chess jumped for Hollister. The big brute tried to squirm away. Tom hit him a straight blow in the right eye and Chess followed with one in the ear.

"Let go!" hissed Hollister. "If you don't, I——"

"The game is up!" cried Tom. "Stop your struggling or we'll smash you!"

Tom got the brute by the throat, thus depriving Hollister of much of his wind. Gradually the rascal subsided, muttering all sorts of imprecations as he did so.

Fred Orman limped to one of the cars and returned with a rope. Hollister's hands were securely tied behind him, and not until then did Ruth and Helen entirely relinquish their holds.

"Good work!" Tom exclaimed approvingly. "I thought he was going to get away."

"Ruth and I are some little scrappers," and Helen laughed nervously.

Chess, observing that her hands trembled, put a protecting arm about her.

"You're all right!" he grinned. "I'll take off my hat to you and Ruth."

"You can't take it off when you've lost it," Helen said. "You'd better go and hunt for it, instead of patting my hand."

Fred Orman and Tom had taken charge of Hollister. The man glared first at one and then the other.

"You've got me this time," he snarled between his teeth; "but I'll get even yet!"

"You can tell your troubles to the judge," Orman retorted, his voice as hard as steel. "I've waited a long time for this moment, Dean Hollister! I believe we have enough evidence to send you where you belong!"

"My scenario—where is it?" Ruth asked anxiously.

"If you mean that rubbish I took from your desk," Hollister sneered, "I threw it away."

"I don't believe it," Fred Orman snapped. "Let's search him!"

Dean Hollister's coat was tightly buttoned, but in spite of the man's protests and savage glares, Tom and Fred Orman stripped him of it. Underneath the protecting clothing they found a large, flat package.

"My scenario!" Ruth exclaimed in delight. "That's it!"

She took the package and ran her eye over the pages to make certain that the manuscript was complete.

"How did you know that Hollister had stolen Ruth's scenario?" Tom asked, turning to the movie actor.

"I didn't know it, but I had my suspicions. You see, I met him to-night and saw him sneak into the hotel by a back way. I walked around, and soon saw a light in the room I knew Miss Fielding occupied. I knew your crowd were at the charity ball and it wouldn't be likely a maid would make the light so late. While I was wondering what to do the light went out. A minute later Hollister leaped from a back piazza and rushed across the lawn. I tried to stop him and he hit me in the head with something and keeled me over.

"When I got over the crack Hollister was gone. As fast as I could, I ran to the garage that hires out cars, got one I had once had before, and drove off to the docks. In spite of what I'd heard, I had a suspicion he had a room in a house down there. So I went to that place again."

"We stopped there shortly after you left," Ruth put in.

"Always before when I asked if Dean Hollister roomed there the landlady told me he didn't. This rascal evidently paid her to tell the lie."

"Hollister skipped off without paying all he owed," Helen added.

"Yes, I know. That made the landlady sore, so, to even scores with him, she tipped me off to the fact that he was beating it out of town. She showed me the road he had taken and I followed him."

"How did you make him stop?" Helen questioned.

"I drove alongside his car and yelled for him to stop. He wouldn't; so I deliberately drove my car in front of his, crosswise in the road. He had to stop then or have a smash-up."

"What shall we do with this bird, now that we have him?" Tom added.

"Have him arrested!" Orman cried quickly.

Ruth nodded in agreement. It was evident that Dean Hollister was a hardened criminal, and it would be absurd to grant him freedom.

Hollister was led against his will to Tom's car. As Orman walked toward the automobile, Ruth observed for the first time that he was limping.

"You're hurt!" she exclaimed.

Orman tried to smile and failed.

"It's nothing. Twisted my leg, and then Hollister gave me a hard kick. I'll be all right."

"You'll go straight to a doctor as soon as we

reach the town. Don't step on your foot any more than you have to."

Hollister was placed in Tom's car, with his hands securely tied behind him. It was agreed that Ruth and Helen should take the car that Orman had used and drive it back to Cedar Grove Bay. Accordingly, Helen took the wheel and followed after Tom's automobile, returning to the town.

The drive along the winding cliff road was uneventful save for one attempt on the part of Hollister to free himself. As the car reached a bend in the road, he struggled to gain his liberty and tried to throw himself out of the automobile. But Chess and Fred Orman were too swift for him, and they hauled him back into the seat, to watch him more closely for the remainder of the ride.

Tom drove directly to the police station, where he turned Hollister over to the authorities. Ruth made a clear, terse statement of her charges against the man. The evidence was considered sufficient and a warrant was sworn out, and Hollister was placed under arrest.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONFESSION

"HOLLISTER—Dean Hollister," the officer in charge at the police station repeated thoughtfully. "I've heard that name before."

He reached into a drawer and took out a packet of photographs, rapidly running through them. He came upon the one for which he searched, and looked first at it and then at the prisoner.

"He's wanted on another charge," the officer informed the group. "The Goodwell Company is after him for a theft he committed about a month ago. He escaped before he could be placed under arrest."

"The Goodwell Company?" Orman questioned, scarcely believing his ears.

"Yes, a series of thefts were committed. Another fellow—I've forgotten his name—was in on the affair too. He was discharged before Hollister was caught. The company let the first fellow go and did not prosecute him because of his previous record."

Ruth and her friends exchanged glances. They knew that the officer unwittingly had spoken of the young movie actor. Hollister had offered no information since his capture, and had barely answered the questions asked him by the police lieutenant. Now, with a sneer on his face, he defied the group.

"There's your other thief," he cried, pointing to Fred Orman. "Arrest him too!"

The officer looked sharply at the young movie actor, but made no move to obey the suggestion.

"Even if your accusations are true, I can't make the arrest. The company has no desire to prosecute him."

"I'm not a thief," Orman defended himself. "It was through this man that I lost my position with the Goodwell Company. I can't prove my innocence, but Hollister framed me!"

"It's a lie! Don't believe him, officer."

Ruth and Orman's other friends were prepared to come to the movie actor's rescue by telling all they knew concerning him, but it was unnecessary. Long experience with men of Hollister's type had taught the officer to draw his own conclusions.

In rapid succession, he fired one question after another at the prisoner. In a moment Hollister was tangled in a net of his own lies. He wilted under the stern eye of the officer and became hopelessly confused.

"You'd better confess the whole affair," the officer informed him severely. "I promise that you'll have a lot easier time of it if you do!"

Hollister knew that he was beaten. His bold front was gone. His eyes roved to the window, but he saw no escape there. He flashed one look of intense hate upon Fred Orman, and then turned to the officer and began the story of his career of crime.

"I lied when I said Orman was a thief," Dean Hollister admitted to the officer. "I never liked him. He was always getting promotions, and the company never gave me any. When I stole money I was afraid I'd be caught, so I made it look as though he had taken it."

The anxiety left Fred Orman's face as Hollister's confession cleared him of all charges. He turned relieved eyes upon his friends.

"After Orman was discharged, I was detected. I found out they were after me, and escaped before they had me arrested. I came to Cedar Grove Bay to hide, and while I was here I learned that Miss Fielding was writing a scenario for a prize competition."

Ruth moved closer to the prisoner, for she did not wish to miss a word of this part of the story.

"I picked up some pages of her manuscript—she had dropped them on the cliff. The notes were good—mighty good—and her ideas meant

money to me. I was nearly broke. I wanted to see the rest of the manuscript, so I entered her room by means of a skeleton key. I was afraid to take the entire scenario for fear she'd track me down."

Ruth glanced at Tom significantly, for this part of the confession coincided with the theory they had worked out for themselves.

"I took some of the minor scenes, and I already had the storm scene," Hollister continued. "I decided to wait until the scenario was entirely finished before taking the rest of it. I thought by taking only two or three of the scenes Miss Fielding would believe she had accidently lost the pages. I planned to get my hands on the complete manuscript, and then get out of town before any one was the wiser. You know the rest of the story. After every one had gone to the dance, I entered the room, broke open the desk, and took the scenario. And I'd have escaped too, if it hadn't been for that fellow!"

Dean Hollister glared furiously at the young movie actor.

"What did you intend to do with the manuscript?" Ruth asked curiously.

"Either sell it or make you come down handsomely for its return. It's a ripper of a scenario. I know a man that would buy it outright without asking any questions."

The lieutenant at the desk ended the confession by giving a sharp order to a policeman who stood near.

"Lock up this man!"

Dean Hollister was taken from the room by the policeman. The lieutenant extended his hand to Fred Orman.

"His confession clears your record," he said cordially. "Accept my congratulations! And unless I'm mistaken, the Goodwell Company will want to thank you too."

Tom, Chess, and the two girls were not slow to express a similar sentiment. Ruth, however, noticed that the movie actor's face was pale and that he was gripping the edge of a chair for support. He had keyed himself up during the period of excitement, but now that the ordeal was over, his strength was leaving him.

"We must take Mr. Orman to a doctor right away," Ruth reminded the others. "He's pretty badly hurt."

"I'm all right," Orman protested. "Just a pain in my leg."

Tom and Chess stepped forward to help him from the police station to the automobile that had been parked outside, but he waved them aside. His face was very white now, and he bit his lip from nervousness and pain.

"Man, you shouldn't walk on that leg," Tom

insisted, though not without admiration for Fred Orman's grit. "You've got to see a doctor."

Fred Orman limped slowly across the floor to the door. The pain in his leg was almost unbearable, but he was proud and hated to admit physical weakness. He groped for the door—things were turning black before his eyes—he felt his knees giving away beneath him.

"I'm all right," he quavered. "I'll be all rig——"

He slumped and would have fallen had not Ruth caught him in her arms.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BANQUET

"He'll be all right after a day or two of rest. No bones are broken, but the muscles are badly twisted."

The doctor to whom Ruth and her friends had taken Fred Orman for medical attention had neatly bandaged the young movie actor's foot and had looked him over carefully.

"Thank goodness," Ruth said in relief. "When he fell there in the police station, I was almost certain his leg was broken."

Orman was helped to Tom's car, and the young folks drove directly to his rooming house.

"A game leg isn't much to pay for getting Hollister behind bars," Orman remarked cheerfully as his friends turned to leave him, after seeing that he was comfortably settled in his own room.

"We'll see you before we leave Cedar Grove Bay," Ruth said kindly. "What you need is a good rest."

"If you ask me," Helen yawned sleepily as

Tom's car was headed toward the hotel, "what we all need is a good rest."

Ruth glanced at her watch.

"It's four o'clock!" she announced in amazement. "We're arriving just in time to bring in the milk."

The lobby of the hotel was deserted save for the sleepy-eyed night clerk who was nodding over a magazine. He revived as the four entered the hotel and came out from behind the desk to greet them rather anxiously.

"Did you catch the thief?"

"Yes, we did," Ruth returned, tapping the flat package in her hand. "And here is my scenario. I'd like to put it in your safe until morning, if I may."

"Certainly," the clerk agreed.

Ruth turned over the manuscript to the clerk and waited until she saw the heavy door of the vault close upon it. Tom and Chess prepared to leave the girls and go to their own hotel.

"I won't rest entirely easy until the scenario is in the New York office," Ruth remarked as she parted with the two young men.

The following morning the four young folks enjoyed a late breakfast together at the girls' hotel. A few hours of sleep had refreshed them all.

"I think it's risky to trust your scenario to the mail," Tom argued. "Why not let Chess and me take it to New York for you? Our vacations are over, anyway, and I want to drive my car through, as I don't care to ship it. You girls can come in a day or two, or whenever you get your packing done."

"That's a splendid idea!" Ruth ejaculated. "I'll feel easier in my mind if I know the scenario is absolutely safe."

As soon as breakfast was over, Tom and Chess left the girls, went to their hotel, packed their bags, settled their bill, returned with the automobile. The manuscript was turned over to Tom.

"Take good care of my brain child," Ruth laughed as the girls said good-bye. "We'll see you in New York in a few days."

Ruth and Helen watched the automobile until it disappeared down the street. Then they turned to their room to attend to their packing.

"It's been one wonderful vacation," Helen sighed, regretful at the thought of leaving the place. "In spite of your work, we've had plenty of time for fun."

"I wonder what Fred Orman will do now that his innocence has been proved?" Ruth mused. "I like the fellow. I don't know whether he's much of an actor or not, but I suspect he is. I'd

like to make room for him in my own company, but just at present I don't know how I could use him."

At dinner time when the two girls were on the point of entering the dining room, Ruth heard her name called. She turned about and saw Fred Orman coming toward her. He was hobbling along on crutches.

"Miss Fielding, I've been looking for you."

"You shouldn't be walking on that foot," Ruth chided, but with a warm smile.

"I feel much better to-day, and, anyway, I couldn't chance your leaving town before I saw you."

"We're leaving to-morrow morning," Ruth informed him.

"I wanted to thank you for the help you've given me in running Hollister down," Orman said gratefully. "My luck seems to have changed. I got a wire from the Goodwell Company this afternoon, and they offered me my old position back again."

"You're taking it?"

"No. I've signed up with the Dowall Company instead. Your letter put the deal over for me, and I've been offered a good position. I think I'll like the place. Of course, I'd rather be with an established company, such as yours, but I can't hope for that yet."

"Would you like to work for me?" Ruth asked with a smile.

"Would I?" Orman's eyes shone.

"I can't promise anything," Ruth returned thoughtfully, "for my work isn't organized for the coming year. But if you care to take the place with the Dowall Company for a few months, I think I can use you later in my own organization."

"I'll keep in close touch with you," Orman promised as he left the two girls. "And when the opening comes, I'll jump at it."

Ruth and Helen left Cedar Grove Bay on the following day, taking the express train to New York City. A telegram from Tom had assured Ruth that her manuscript was safely in the hands of the judges of the international competition.

At the New York station, Tom and Chess were on hand to meet the girls and to escort them to a hotel.

"I hope you aren't too tired to celebrate," Tom remarked.

"What have you planned this time, Tom?" Ruth asked.

"It isn't my work at all. Mr. Hammond knew you were to be in the city to-day, and he planned a banquet in your honor. But it's up to you, Ruth. If you feel too tired, the whole thing's off."

"A banquet in my honor?" Ruth cried in surprise and delight. "What have I done to deserve that, I'd like to know?"

"You've helped Mr. Hammond out of difficulty more than once," Tom reminded her. "And, anyway, I have a sneaking notion he suspects you'll win the international contest, and wants to get a jump on the other producers."

"I'm not too tired for anything," Ruth announced enthusiastically. "I'd better take a banquet when I can get it, because if I wait until I win the prize—well, I may wait a long time! Mr. Hammond has always been such a good friend to me. It's wonderful of him to give a dinner in my honor—especially when he knows as well as I do that if I lose in the contest my reputation as a scenario writer will take a slump!"

"Ruthie, what are you going to wear?" demanded Helen.

"Everything I have is pretty well worn and maybe it would be better for a guest of honor to have a new gown," replied Ruth. "Oh, Helen, you go and look for something and when you find it I can come and try it on!"

Helen was in her element, and shopped happily until she found a gown of a soft blue chiffon velvet that she declared "must have been designed for Ruth." For herself she purchased a dainty

rose crêpe de chine that brought out her dark prettiness to perfection.

The banquet, given at a fashionable hotel, was an elaborate affair, for Mr. Hammond never did anything by halves. Many prominent scenario writers, directors, motion picture stars and other people connected with the profession, were gathered about the table, at the head of which Ruth and Mr. Hammond were seated. Ruth lost herself in the pleasure of congenial companions. The service was perfect, and the producer had gone to considerable expense in decoration and entertainment.

Just before going to the table, Ruth ran across Mr. Grimes, a director under whom Ruth had once worked. The girl was pleased to talk again with the man, for though at one time she was convinced that he was one of the most disagreeable men in the motion picture business, she had since learned that his ugliness was only an exterior shell.

"What are your plans for the future?" Mr. Hammond asked Ruth. The banquet was over, and Tom was waiting for her to say good-bye to her friends. "Not thinking of managing a home, are you?"

Ruth gave Tom a quick glance, and blushed.

"Not yet," she declared boldly, but there was a warm light in her eyes.

"Well, if you run out of work, I'll be glad to furnish you with some of mine. I know there's no use to ask you to direct one of my new pictures."

"No, I'm afraid I haven't the time," Ruth replied, smiling. "Unless this international competition ruins my reputation, I have some important plans to work out for my own company."

"I admire your courage," Mr. Hammond replied. He dropped his voice so that only Tom and Ruth could hear. "I hope you win the contest, and I don't wish to discourage you. But you took a mighty big risk when you pitted yourself against the best writers in the world. Failure ought not to endanger your reputation—but it sometimes does!"

"I know," Ruth admitted soberly. "But I'd rather face the situation than be a poor sport."

"You have the right spirit," Mr. Hammond said approvingly. "And, of course, you may win."

But Ruth and Tom both noticed that the director spoke without conviction.

Did he think Ruth would fail?

CHAPTER XXV

THE DECISION

"RUTH, do watch what you're doing. You're peeling that potato down to nothing. Aunt Alvirah won't have enough for dinner! You must have your mind on that brother of mine again."

Helen Cameron, perched precariously on the corner of the kitchen table at the Red Mill, giggled mischievously. Ruth came to life with a start.

"Sorry—didn't mean to day dream." She held up what remained of the potato and regarded it ruefully. "I can't seem to keep my thoughts on my work lately."

Aunt Alvirah laboriously extracted herself from a chair and hobbled over to Ruth.

"Oh, my back! and, oh, my bones!" Gently she took the potato and the knife from Ruth's hands. "Let me do it, my pretty. You run outside with Helen. It ain't no use trying to work when you're worried."

"I'm not really worrying," Ruth laughed, handing over the knife reluctantly. "I'm a little

nervous, I'll admit. It's been three weeks now since I sent my manuscript to New York and I haven't heard a word from it."

"What can you expect?" Uncle Jabez Potter demanded with a slightly I-told-you-so attitude. He was washing at the sink, and with his face lathered with soap, turned around and looked at his niece. "You shouldn't have gone into a contest like that if you didn't want to get beat! If you'd asked me, I'd 'a' told you to keep out."

Ruth bit her lip and made no reply.

"Never mind, my pretty," Aunt Alvirah soothed, patting Ruth's hand. "If they don't want your story you can sell it to some one else."

Ruth smiled and gave Aunt Alvirah an affectionate squeeze. The old lady with her simple faith in Ruth's ability did not realize the importance of the competition.

"If you don't win, you can produce the picture yourself," Helen suggested.

"I don't want to do that, Helen. In the first place, the picture is an expensive one to film, and I haven't the money to spare right now. And then, half the fun of it would be the knowledge that I had won this prize in competition with the best scenario writers in the world."

Helen, Ruth, and Tom had returned from New York City nearly three weeks before. Chess had been forced to remain in the city to attend

to business, but he had promised to run down to Cheslow for the week end.

During the three weeks that she had been at the Red Mill, Ruth had found it impossible to settle down to a comfortable existence. After the first week she began to watch for the postman, and as the days slipped by and no word came from the New York office, her anxiety increased. She could not set herself to the task of mapping out the fall work of the Fielding Film Company until she was relieved of the suspense.

"I'd rather know that I'd failed and have it over with," Ruth declared. "Anything but this uncertainty."

On this particular day, Helen and Ruth were planning a picnic supper in honor of Chess, who was to spend the week end in Cheslow.

"Tom has gone to the station to meet Chess," Helen informed Ruth as soon as the two had left the kitchen of the Red Mill. "I stopped in the town and bought some things to take along."

"I baked a cake this morning," Ruth added. "It's the most constructive bit of work I've done for weeks."

Helen was gazing down the road at an automobile that was rapidly drawing nearer the Red Mill.

"Tom's coming now," she announced. "And Chess is with him."

Chess was warmly greeted by the two girls. Ruth returned to the kitchen to collect napkins, knives, forks and other picnic utensils. When she came outside again, she thought that Helen looked at her rather queerly, but she was not sure and so said nothing about it.

The four climbed into the automobile and drove to a favorite picnic spot near the river. While Ruth and Helen spread the tablecloth and uncovered the tempting dishes, Tom and Chess built a small campfire.

"Helen's getting to be a real cook," Chess observed, looking meaningly at Tom. "Such art is too good to waste. I'm going to tie her up pretty soon, for fear some other man will get her."

"Don't be too sure," Helen laughed, but the teasing note was no longer in her voice.

Ruth, looked at her quickly, wondered if it would be very long before her chum married Chess. Once Helen had declared that she would not marry Chess until Ruth consented to a double wedding. But Helen was evidently weakening.

"Ruth, I've been awfully mean." Helen turned serious eyes to her friend. "But I didn't want to ruin the picnic with bad news."

"Bad news?"

"I don't know whether it's bad or good news. While you were in the kitchen back at the Red

Mill, the postman brought your letter with the New York postmark. I put it in my pocket and didn't show it to you. I knew if your scenario didn't win the prize, you wouldn't enjoy the picnic this afternoon."

As Helen spoke, she took a thin envelope from her pocket and handed it to Ruth, who clutched at it eagerly. The girl ripped open the envelope. Tom, Chess, and Helen watched her face as she read the contents.

"It's all right!" Ruth cried in delight. "My scenario has won the prize!"

"Hurrah!" Tom yelled, and caught Ruth in his arms and lifted her off the ground, kissing her twice as he did so.

"Best news I've heard in a year," cried Chess.

"And to think I carried that letter around all afternoon because I thought it might be bad news," Helen mourned. Then she too kissed Ruth.

The letter informed Ruth that she had won the fifty thousand dollar prize. She had defeated hundreds of the best scenario writers from every country of the world.

"The letter says I may supervise the filming of the story if I wish," Ruth went on happily. "The judges especially liked my storm scene. I think that part of the manuscript really put my scenario across. Thank goodness, my worries

are over now. I can settle down to work again."

"Work?" Tom groaned. "Don't mention the word! It reminds me that this is the last week I can play around."

"We have had some jolly times this summer," Ruth observed. She glanced at Tom and saw that he was regarding her intently. During the conversation he had been busy with his knife carving figures upon an old board.

"What are you up to now?" Helen asked curiously.

"Nothing." Tom deliberately kept his eyes on Ruth's face. "I was just thinking of saving Ruth the trouble of carving a name for herself in the motion picture world. How does this one suit you, Ruthie?"

As Tom spoke, he held up the board so that Ruth could see the lettering. Engraved upon it were two initials that Tom had cut in the wood—and the letters were R. C.

THE END

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